The Honorable UNCLE LANCY

ETHEL HUESTON



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THE HONORABLE UNCLE LANCY

By ETHEL HUESTON

PRUDENCE OF THE PARSONAGE
PRUDENCE SAYS SO
PRUDENCE'S SISTER
PRUDENCE'S DAUGHTER
LEAVE IT TO DORIS
EVE TO THE RESCUE
MERRY O
SWEDEY
COASTING DOWN EAST
IDLE ISLAND
GINGER ELLA
GINGER AND SPEED
THE PEOPLE OF THIS TOWN
BIRDS FLY SOUTH
FOR GINGER'S SAKE
ROWENA RIDES THE RUMBLE
GOOD TIMES
THAT HASTINGS GIRL
BLITHE BALDWIN
BEAUTY FOR SALE
STAR OF THE WEST
THE MAN OF THE STORM
A ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS
CALAMITY JANE OF DEADWOOD GULCH
HIGH BRIDGE

The Honorable
UNCLE LANCY

by

ETHEL HUESTON



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THE HONORABLE UNCLE LANCY

Chapter I

Aunt Olympia, the Senator's wife (Mrs. Alençon Delaporte Slopshire, properly but rarely pronounced Slupshur) went to Iowa for the funeral. Even in their sorrow, the three girls tragically orphaned in the double bereavement took plaintive pleasure in that. It was no more than she should have done, being their mother's own and only sister. Still, she was a senator's wife, and young as they were and little as they had seen of her, the girls had learned that senators' wives, even more than officeholders themselves, make unlimited use of the safe alibi of "bills pending." This was an important session, too, it being election year.

Aunt Olympia flew out from Washington. This added definite importance to her coming. For the most part, air service in Iowa is confined to the delivery of mail, stop-offs on transcontinental flights and significant political comings and goings. Although Aunt Olympia was a senator's wife, not by any imaginative flight could political significance be attached to her attendance at the funeral. The Senator had no constituents to be placated there. Iowa was not his state.

Brother Rasmusson, a deacon in the church that had been their father's, drove over to meet her at the airport in Iowa City. Their own car would never run again. It lay in the garage of Bill Blakely—one of their members—a twisted and charred mass of metal from the collision with

a drunken driver at the corner of North Square and Main. On prayer meeting night it had happened. The three girls, Helen, twenty-one, Adele, nineteen, and Limpy—named for Aunt Olympia—three years younger, felt tearful sorrow, even shame, that they had not gone to prayer meeting with their parents on that fateful night. When they went to prayer meeting—if even one of them went—their father always stopped at Karl's Kandy Kitchen for an ice cream sundae on the way home. "Reward of merit," he called it. "Baksheesh" the girls said it was, having gleefully adopted the word from the lecture of a returned missionary trying to raise funds for the further evangelization of heathen Near Easterners.

On that terrible Wednesday night, if even one of them had gone, the half-hour spent over the sundaes at the Kandy Kitchen would have delayed their parents' arrival at the corner of North Square and Main and there would have been no collision with the big car careening madly along the icy streets, with "poor Bob" Saunders drunk at the wheel. But that night only their father and mother had gone and now they lay together in a double casket in the Allan Funeral Parlor, awaiting burial on the morrow. Both had been instantly killed in the crash. "Poor Bob" had been tossed through the door and flung across thirty feet of ice and snow, and had incurred only a broken wrist and a bruised brow.

The girls, watching from the window of the parsonage, saw Deacon Rasmusson drive carefully up to their curb, bringing Aunt Olympia from the airport. They did not, as in normal times, run happily down the steps to greet her but waited decorously inside the door while the Deacon

assisted her up the icy, ash-strewn steps. Aunt Olympia was dressed in a modish gray woolen ensemble and draped in silver fox. In answer to what she took to be a faint questioning in the girls' sad eyes, her first words were a hasty avowal that she had brought black for the funeral, though she disapproved of mourning.

Aunt Olympia, who had turned violently red and sniffy at sight of the sheaf of wheat and frozen lilies on the front door, broke into open sobs in the presence of the three girls. They looked pale and young and frightened in their slim black gowns. Adele, both in mourning and out, was the beauty of the family, but Helen's quiet dignity and maternal gentleness were appealing and the quivering eagerness of Limpy's youth, half brave, half terrified, carried her straight to Aunt Olympia's heaving bosom.

Aunt Olympia had a series of emotional expressions, with which the girls later became amusedly familiar and to which in time they accorded the dignity of statistical numbers. The first of these—the one that swept over her at sight of the wheat and lilies on the parsonage door—manifested itself in a sudden quiver of what would have been a double chin had it not been for the vigorous hundred strokes waged upon it three times a day by the indefatigable Olympia. This trembling of the under-chin was followed by a deep flush that descended swiftly from the roots of her hair out of sight below the neckline of her dress, accompanied by a hissing suction of the lips, which she finally brought under control by catching the left corner of her mouth between very strong white teeth. On rare occasions of absolutely uncontrollable emotion, as now, this expression spent itself in explosive sobs.

Aunt Olympia never surrendered long to emotion. One after another she drew the girls to her in a passionate embrace and began divesting herself of her furs with a bustling show of energy.

"Would you like to—see them—right away, Auntie, before you take off your wraps?" asked Helen tearfully. "They—are at the funeral parlor. We can drive right down—if you like."

"No!" Aunt Olympia spoke, as she moved, gustily. "No! I don't want to see them at all. Not at any time." She sat down heavily. "I want to remember your mother as I saw her last. . . . Nine years ago, it was. Your father was hurrying me off to catch my train, I remember, and she was spanking you, Limpy, for cutting paper dolls out of the *Congressional Record* I was saving to read on the train. It had an important speech of the Senator's—"

"I read quite a lot of it first," said Limpy, quickly defensive. "It was very dull. I didn't see how anybody could possibly want to read it."

"You hadn't come to the Senator's speech," said Aunt Olympia kindly. "It was farther along. . . . No, I'd rather remember her like that."

The house, in the unaccountable, time-honored custom in periods of bereavement, had been taken out of the girls' hands by the officious kindliness of neighbors. These could be heard moving about, taking away Aunt Olympia's bag and wraps, rearranging chairs and dishes, rattling papers as they unwrapped the flowers and neighborly offerings of food that came to the door. Occasionally they entered the living room to show the flowers and gifts, to ask inane questions, to make suggestions, to serve

tea and wafers; and always to look the Senator's wife over with inquisitive, friendly interest. They were introduced briefly by Helen to "our Aunt Olympia, Mrs. Slopshire." Aunt Olympia watched everything, everybody, with keen, appraising eyes whose pale blueness seemed curiously at odds with their keen attentiveness.

"It's a strange thing," she remarked crisply, when Sister Alhard had bustled away with the tea tray, "how dumb kindness always is!"

The girls looked decorously shocked.

"Like this." She indicated the room with a wave of her plump, well-kept hand. "Doing things for you. Doing everything. Letting you do nothing for yourselves. Best thing in the world for sadness, work is; the harder the better. Busy hands are the best antidote for sad feelings. But no! If you're sad, you just sit down and be as sad as you can and let the neighbors wait on you and remind you how sad you are."

"They mean well," said Helen apologetically.

"Funny, isn't it, how the best feelings are usually the dumbest acting?" said Aunt Olympia.

The girls let that go. After all, she was their aunt; she had just flown out from Washington—in January—to attend the funeral. Obviously, the less said, the better.

Aunt Olympia couldn't take her eyes off Limpy. Limpy had fairly taken her breath away. Aunt Olympia hadn't a very clear idea of what she had expected Limpy to be; sometimes she had thought of her as the child being spanked for her mischief; and then, remembering the years, had reminded herself that Limpy was a young lady—about like Helen, perhaps. And here she found that Limpy was

neither the one nor the other, but poised expectantly between the two, with eyes turned alternately one way and the other.

"How old are you, Limpy?" she demanded suddenly.

"Oh—about seventeen," said Limpy.

"Sixteen, by the family Bible," corrected Adele.

"Seventeen, minus a small fraction," insisted Limpy.

"Sixteen plus, and not a very big plus either," argued Adele.

"Oh, well, sixteen plus is seventeen minus, according to the mathematics I flunked last year. I prefer minuses."

Callers came to the door almost constantly. The women kissed the girls all round. One raised tentative lips to Aunt Olympia but was deterred by a sudden tightening of the full, flushed face.

"Funny thing," she remarked later in her resounding whisper, "how kissing seems to go neck and neck with bereavements. In my opinion, a kiss is not a bit more sympathetic than a hearty handshake and not half as hygienic."

Dr. Ainslie, "Brother Ainslie," the girls called him, the district superintendent of their Conference, came, too. And as if by prearranged agreement, the neighbors trooped in from all over the house, from kitchen and dining room and from upstairs where they were interestedly unpacking Aunt Olympia's bag and tidying up drawers and closets with that fond license bereavement so blessedly accords.

Dr. Ainslie shook hands with everyone, murmuring words of sympathy couched in Biblical phraseology as far as possible, and then said, "Shall we pray?"

All dropped to their knees beside their chairs. They had

gone through many bereavements and knew what was expected of them. Helen glanced rather uneasily toward Aunt Olympia and was relieved to see her kneeling with the rest, though not without some trouble in her smart gray skirt which had not been fitted for prayer.

Dr. Ainslie went into a detailed exposition of the tragic event and dwelt at ardent length on the rare virtues of the deceased parents and the pathetic estate of the three sweet girls until he had them all in tears. Aunt Olympia cried, too; she couldn't help it. But when he reached the final and prolonged amen, she rose as hastily as she could in her tight skirt, violently red of face, and marched out of the room without a word.

" Please excuse me—I'll go with Auntie," said Helen, wiping her eyes.

She followed Aunt Olympia silently up the stairs. The upper hallway, wide and old-fashioned, spotlessly clean—kindly neighbors had even freshly laundered the hall curtains—showed four doors, three standing invitingly open, one closed. Aunt Olympia took one look at the closed door and turned quickly away, dabbing furiously at her eyes.

"You are to have my room, Aunt Olympia, at the end of the hall," Helen said gently. "I moved in here with Adele. . . . That's Limpy's room; it's so tiny there's hardly room even for one."

There was no need for her to say they could not—not yet—bear to put anybody, not even Aunt Olympia, in that room behind the closed door. "Their room," it had been, their father's and mother's. "Mother's room," they had always called it, though shared by both.

Aunt Olympia stalked down the hall to the door indicated.

"If you're expecting any more preachers," she began, so vigorously that Helen hastily closed the door on what was to follow, "I'll stay here till they've come and gone. And if any pop in unexpectedly, kindly give me a wink and I'll retire. In my opinion, we Christians can do our own praying. Humph! Why should he feel called on to recount the gory details to God? Seems to me it's almost an insult to God's intelligence!" Helen cleared her throat, nervously. Aunt Olympia sniffed again. "Makes me think of the opening prayers at Republican campaign meetings," she went on irritably. "They always start off telling God, point by point, how it is up to Him and the Republican party to come to the aid of the nation."

"Why don't you rest a while before dinner, Auntie?" said Helen tactfully. "I know you must be tired from your trip and all these people dropping in are strangers to you. They do mean well, but—"

"Yes, I'll rest till that preacher gets out of the house. He may think of something he left out. Next time, you give me the high sign. You'd think God was asleep up there, having to get what's going on from reporters at this end!" She blew her nose with vicious vigor and dabbed at her eyes with much the same gesture she used on the under chin.

"Do take a little rest, Auntie. I'll let you know when dinner is ready. And if you want anything, just call me; I'll not be far away."

Aunt Olympia approved, with a gleam of genuine warmth in her pale blue eyes, of the table to which she

was called that night. The food, which had been both prepared and contributed by generous, pitying friends, was lavish in quantity, as enticing in appearance as in taste. There were roast turkey and ham and little country sausages; there were home-canned vegetables and jams and pickles; there were three kinds of pie and four kinds of cake.

"There's nothing like variety to bolster up a sagging appetite," she remarked approvingly.

Two women, wives of important members, sat at table with them but the others, lesser perhaps in church office but just as high in friendly service, insisted on "waiting," and "passing things."

"Do have another slice of Brother Walker's turkey, Sister Slopshire." "This ham is delicious—it's Mrs. Graves's ham. Do take a little slice, Helen." "Take this wishbone, Limpy; you're not eating anything." "Have you tried Mrs. Oakley's cake? I always say she makes the best cake in our church."

The girls, with no appetite, tried desperately to please all by sampling every dish that represented such wholehearted pity, but their eyes would wander—and start away as if frightened—to that chair at the head of the table where their father always had sat. No one sat there tonight. Even the chair had been removed and put back against the wall. A huge jar of Sister Smith's baked beans stood where his plate once had been.

Aunt Olympia's appreciation of their efforts plainly pleased the ladies, though she had little taste for food that night. When they protested that she had eaten nothing, she said pleasantly, "I've eaten more than I would have

thought possible an hour ago. And besides, the looks and the smell of that food do you good whether you eat it or not."

That was a nice speech for the Senator's wife.

Another stream of callers came in the evening—most of them bearing gifts, more cakes, more jellies, more pies.

"They seem to think," whispered Aunt Olympia, "that a bereavement gives you an appetite. But it's a nice idea."

The lawyer came, too. Brother Wilton, one of their members, he had been. Now suddenly, in this tragedy, of his own offer, he had become their lawyer. He announced with satisfaction that "poor Bob" was well covered with insurance and the company's agent had already been in to make an offer of a cash settlement of ten thousand dollars.

"They offer ten? Then they'll pay twenty," said Aunt Olympia.

"We can get twenty-five, easy, if we bring suit. We can sue for fifty and maybe get even thirty-five. It's open and shut."

"We can't sue," said Helen faintly. "Poor Bob—was one of our own members. We couldn't sue a member. We'd rather settle—for anything."

"They'll have to come through with the price of your car," said the lawyer, speaking in the lingo of the law instead of the church. "Your father was insured for that and your company will make them pay through the nose."

"Father had two thousand life insurance besides," said Helen. "They've already sent a check for that."

"Did your mother have any insurance?" asked Aunt Olympia.

"Mother? Oh, no, not Mother!"

"Funny thing," mused Aunt Olympia. "Preachers' wives always wear out first—and no wonder—after the life their husbands and the churches lead them. The wives die! And look at all the superannuateds hobbling around to the century mark. But I never in my life heard of a preacher's wife being insured."

On the day of the funeral Aunt Olympia was strangely quiet. Her voice, when she did speak, was soft, almost tremulous. Her oddly keen, pale blue eyes were gentle. Though she watched everything that went on about her, she made no comment. She objected to nothing. She broadcast no scathing whispers. For the most part, she watched the girls, all of them together and each of them separately, Limpy in particular. She noticed their mannerisms, their movements; not even the intonation of their voices escaped her. She scrutinized their clothes and the way they wore them. She took particular account of the cordial and sisterly understanding between them and did not overlook the very apparent affection shown them by everyone who came to their door, whether on errand of business or sympathy.

It was not until the undertaker came to rehearse the last plans for the funeral that her air of gentle consideration left her. Then, as she heard the detailed arrangements, a striking change registered on her mobile face. The pale eyes narrowed to resentful slits; the soft lips tightened to wrinkled hardness; her chin went up, drawing the underfullness to the vanishing point.

"Do I understand you to say," she demanded, "that these poor children are supposed to sit there in that front pew and wait and watch and—suffer—until all those sightseers in

the church have walked by and—viewed the remains?"

The undertaker—Brother Allan, it was—turned vaguely to Helen.

"It's the usual custom," he said apologetically.

"It's as heathenish and cruel as most of our usual customs," said the Senator's wife. "I won't permit it. Switch things around the other way. Let the audience look as they come in before they take their seats and get it over with. Then when you're ready to begin, you give us our cue and we'll come in."

"It's the usual cust— er, it's the general practice," he amended hastily, "for the chief mourners—to take the last look."

"Do you girls want to walk by—in public—and parade your feelings before the audience?" demanded Aunt Olympia.

"We do not want them, the people, I mean, to feel—not satisfied. They are our friends, you know, Auntie, and they were their friends. They loved them both so much. I want them to—be satisfied."

"Now, I'll tell you how to fix it," said Aunt Olympia briskly. "You have everything ready. As people come in, have the ushers indicate they are to pass down—and look. Then—if the girls want to, though in their condition they don't know what they want and will wish they hadn't if they do—let them walk up alone, after the service, and then—close the casket, quickly, and—go."

Brother Allan was a little distressed about it. It was decidedly outside the pale of custom, and funerals, of all things in the world, should be according to custom. Still, she was a senator's wife; and he yielded.

The church was packed for the funeral. It was their father's own church, the biggest church in town, and both the minister and his wife had been warmly loved. The suddenness, the tragic shockingness of the manner of their passing, the double bereavement, even the double casket and the double interment—first in the history of the town—attracted the morbid interest even of strangers. The district superintendent conducted the service. They would have had the Bishop, but he was away with his secretary, making a tour of the Holy Land at the expense of the church, gathering material for a report on the state of the Armenians. Their own church choir sang.

Even in their sadness, the girls, in somber black, felt satisfaction that Aunt Olympia, the Senator's wife, was with them, she also in respectable but more expensive black. As they passed down the aisle they could hear among the stifled sobs of their friends, among the tender murmurs, "those poor dear children" . . . "sweet girls" . . . "the darlings," other words that gave them a sad pleasure: "the Senator's wife" . . . "their aunt" . . . "flew out from Washington."

Aunt Olympia displayed a proper, customary sorrow during the services, frequently patting her eyes under her veil with a very fine, perfumed handkerchief. When Limpy shivered suddenly and was seized with a spasm of nervous trembling, Aunt Olympia put her arm around her and stroked the slim, black-clad knee with tender sympathy until the tremor had passed.

The parsonage was in quiet readiness for their sad return. Sister Alhard and Mrs. Cox had remained away from the funeral in order to attend to those final domestic

rites. The extra chairs, borrowed from neighboring houses for the influx of visitors, had been returned to their owners. Pieces of furniture had been restored to their original position in the room. A cheerful fire had been set blazing in the grate and a bowl of roses brightened the low table in the living room. Food had been prepared, and the table laid for their evening meal.

Sister Alhard received them gently, helped them remove their wraps and then announced that she and Mrs. Cox would run along home now to look after their own little flocks; if they wanted anything, she said heartily, just give her a ring and she would be right over.

Aunt Olympia and the three girls, left alone together, were a little disconsolate. The girls tried to live up to their parsonage training for Aunt Olympia's sake and she tried to be bright and cheery for theirs, but their efforts were not very successful. At least on this night they were not obliged to force food between unwilling lips by way of thanks to loving donors.

When they had finished their dinner and sat, distraught and ill at ease, the four of them, before the fire Helen had freshly stirred to life, Aunt Olympia said with some abruptness:

"How about the future? Have you got any ideas—made any plans—worked anything out in your minds about what you want to do—from this on?" Only a slight quiver of the curving under-chin betrayed her passionate interest in their answer.

"There's only one thing we can do," said Helen bravely. "The insurance will carry us nicely until the girls have finished school. Father wouldn't let me teach this year,

though I finished college last year and have my state license, because he thought I should get a good rest after my operation for appendicitis. But I get a good deal of substitute work here in town and next year I'll take a school of my own and settle down to business. Adele will finish college, of course. Limpy will finish high school next month—"

"Whoever heard of finishing school in the middle of the winter?" said Aunt Olympia. "A poor way to run a school, in my opinion."

"Don't blame the school," said Adele, smiling. "Rather blame young seventeen-year-old minuses, who simply will not study math and flunk it consistently, year after year."

"Don't you think it is very incongruous, Auntie," said Limpy, in her own defense, "that the highest in I. Q.'s should be the lowest in geometry and algebra? You can't help thinking there's something wrong either with the school or the teacher."

"There just couldn't be anything wrong with the pupil," said Adele.

"Well, naturally not! Look at my I. Q.!"

"Anyhow, Limpy finishes high school next month," said Helen. "Then, college. That was the way we had planned, and we'll just carry on. Maybe we can get a small house somewhere or a floor of housekeeping rooms and use our own furniture. Even if I take a school away from here next year, Adele and Limpy can go right ahead and I will come home week ends. . . . We'll have to give up the parsonage right away, of course."

Aunt Olympia drew a full breath and opened her lips. But for once in her life, someone spoke ahead of her. It was Adele.

"Helen," she said, "I don't want to go on through college. I don't want to teach school. And we ought not to use up that insurance money as we go along. We ought to keep it for—for emergencies. Last week, it never occurred to any of us that—sudden—and terrible things could happen to us, upset our plans. Now, we know they can happen. We must save as much of that money as we can for—just such unexpected crises. I want to take a business course, Helen. I always did want to. It won't cost much either, and won't take long. I'd so much rather go into business than teach school."

Aunt Olympia started to speak and then, wisely, thought better of it. This was the girls' business, not hers. She closed her lips so tightly that only a pale blue line remained of their fullness.

"Father was opposed to that, Adele," Helen reminded her. "You know he always felt it was too—temptatious—for pretty girls to be ensconced in private offices with rich men." Tears came to her eyes at her quotation of her father's old word of warning, but she blinked them away determinedly.

"I can be secretary for a bishop, perhaps, like Goldie Burns, and travel around the world at the expense of the church. There's nothing temptatious about bishops."

"I don't want to go to college, either," said Limpy suddenly. "You know Father always admitted he was going to have trouble with me. You can see I couldn't very well teach school when I can't even graduate on time. I want to take my share of the insurance money and go to a big city and take some kind of an exciting course in something and—"

"What kind of an exciting course?" asked Aunt Olympia, who had hung on Limpy's every word.

"I don't know exactly," admitted Limpy. "But the more exciting the better. Stage setting, or dress designing, or acting, or play writing—"

"Have you any talent for any of those things?" demanded Aunt Olympia.

"I don't think so," said Limpy honestly. "But everyone says they are very exciting and I may discover some latent talent not yet suspected, even by me. Anyhow, I won't go to college and I won't teach school and—"

"You won't get a share of the insurance till you're eighteen, Limpy," Helen said uneasily. "Brother Wilton will have charge of that, you know."

"Well, if he won't give me the money for an exciting course in something, I'll take a business course," persisted Limpy. "I'm not pretty enough to be temptatious, as Adele is. It was her looks that Father thought would be dangerous. I'll bet you I could spend ten years right in the very lap of a—a—a United States President without being in a minute's worth of danger."

"You must go to college, Limpy," said Helen. "And Adele must finish and then decide what she wants. She will be older then and will know better what she really wants."

"Girls," began Aunt Olympia, in a voice that had gone up two tones in pitch. In her emotional condition she alternately jabbed her wet eyes with her fingers and then fell, from habit, to a furious massage of her under-chin, quite unaware that she did either. "Girls, you know your mother and I were sisters. We were closer than sisters.

We were almost like a couple of sections of one soul. When we were young, that is. We haven't seen much of each other the last twenty years, but we never changed. Now—you know, girls, I have things pretty nice with the Senator. And Washington's a lovely town, full of buildings, and—and saddle paths and—golf courses—a very nice town! . . . We haven't any children of our own. And no fault of ours, either, though it's thrown up to us plenty during campaigns that the best we have done for posterity is a couple of pedigreed pups. . . . And nothing we can do about it, either. You can't come out even in a mud-slinging campaign and show a doctor's certificate for such private details. But it's always been a great grief to the Senator and me, and if you girls would come and make us a nice long visit and—and live with us a while—you might get to like it, in time. Limpy could go to a girls' school right there and live at home. They've got good schools in Washington and it isn't as if we couldn't afford it. Helen could get rested up after her operation as her father wished, and you could all take time to get over this terrible shock and—get your feet on the ground again. Washington itself is an education. Everybody says Washington is a liberal education. Too damn liberal some say, but an education anyhow. Think what an experience it would be for you three young things to live for a while in the town where great national figures like Andrew Jackson, Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson lived, and did, and died for their country, and sent their voices ringing down the corridor of time!"

The girls, who had gazed wide-eyed and speechless at this surprising proposal, smiled faintly at that.

"Washington—mmmmm, Washington," said Limpy, with an impish sparkle that brought sudden hot tears to the eyes of both her sisters. It was Limpy's own impish sparkle; she had been born with it; but the girls had seen not a pale glimmer of it since this terrible tragedy had happened to them. They had never really expected to see it again. Yet here it was—a little feeble, a little wan and tearful, but Limpy's sparkle, or the shadow of it.

"Washington," she mused. "Let's see now! Seems to me I've heard of another couple of guys that used to hang out around there. George Washington, didn't he have something to do with it? Was it named for him or the other 'way round? And Lincoln! Or is he just a handsome memorial and the name of an address?"

"To be sure!" agreed Aunt Olympia, agreeably. "You're perfectly right! George Washington and Abraham Lincoln! Just think what an experience, what an education, what a—what a—a preparation for the future it would be for you girls! And what a pleasure to the poor dear Senator and me!"

"But, Aunt Olympia," Helen reminded her gently, "you know we are—we are not—well, we are not really Democrats!"

"Who is?" demanded Aunt Olympia triumphantly. "And for that matter, who's really a Republican any more? Except maybe Hoover—and even he started out the other way 'round, didn't he?"

"But, Aunt Olympia, what would the Senator think, having you plunk three large-sized orphan nieces down on him like that?"

"He'd love it! Who wouldn't?" she countered quickly.

"Especially pretty ones!—I see Adele is still the best-looking. But that's all right. You're all good-looking enough, and beauty isn't everything; though I sometimes think," she added honestly, "that in most cases it seems to be plenty! . . . You know, girls," she added pathetically, swabbing absent-mindedly at her chin, "I adored your mother. And she loved me! And I'd like—and I think she'd like—to have her children with me as my very own for a while. She knows how I felt about those children I didn't have and I know she'd like to lend me hers. And you never can tell what might come of it. Everybody goes to Washington some time or another. You can meet anybody there: rich men, poor men, diplomats, congressmen—the place is lousy with congressmen, both incumbent and ex. No one knows what great, good things might come of your being there with me. What do you think of it?" she asked eagerly.

"We are so surprised we can't think at all," said Helen. "But we do think it is wonderful of you to ask us and it would certainly be a marvelous opportunity for Adele and Limpy. It is different with me, of course. I am quite strong enough to go to work and I must. But the girls—"

Adele and Limpy voiced explosive, simultaneous protest.

"Nothing stirring!"

"Father said you must rest a year!"

"And you needn't try to shuffle us off somewhere to get rid of us! We're a family, and we're going to stick it out together."

"You can't stick it out together forever," interposed Aunt Olympia. "When you go to work you'll be separated. When you marry, you'll be separated."

"We could pay our expenses all right with the insurance money," mused Helen thoughtfully.

"You pay nothing with that insurance money! You save that insurance money for emergencies, as Adele says. If you come with me, you come as my own children, and—the Senator pays the bills. And I will say for the Senator, he's got money and he's willing to spend it. He's no begrudger. . . . Except maybe on taxes. . . . Well, is it all settled then?"

"Not quite settled," said Helen, smiling. "We haven't decided; there are so many things to consider. And you haven't asked the Senator."

"Asked the Senator!" ejaculated Aunt Olympia. "Asked the Senator what? Whoever asks the Senator about anything until it is settled?"

"We do!" said Helen firmly. "We sha'n't even think about it until we find out how he feels about it."

"And we don't want him to—just stand it," added Adele swiftly. "We want him to be—well, almost pleased about it."

"Or at least not exactly displeased," corroborated Limpy.

"You talk to him about it when you go home," said Helen, "and let us know how he feels."

"When I go home! But you're going with me!"

Helen shook her head. "Not unless you stay till the close of the semester. Limpy's got to finish high school. That will give the Senator plenty of time to decide how he feels about the idea."

Aunt Olympia gave a derisive snort. "It takes him no time at all for me to make up my mind," she said. "I'll call him up right now and settle it."

"Call him up!"

"In Washington?"

"It'll cost a young fortune to call up Washington!"

"I'll reverse the charge," added Aunt Olympia.

"I didn't mean that," said Helen, flushing. "I just mean there's no special hurry about it."

"Yes there is a hurry! I won't be able to sleep any more till it's settled. And I have to rush along back and keep an eye on those bills of his. But anyhow, I'm always in a hurry when I've decided anything."

She started for the telephone.

"Please don't reverse the charge," said Helen.

"I have to. I always reverse the charge. If I don't he'll think I'm sick and start a long argument about castor oil."

Aunt Olympia got the Senator on a long-distance call to Washington. He had been in bed and asleep but he answered cheerfully enough.

"You girls come here," whispered Aunt Olympia. "You listen for yourselves." She was very sure of the Senator.

"Hello, Del," she boomed heartily into the transmitter. "Got you out of bed, eh?"

"I wasn't quite asleep," he assured her politely.

"Del, I want to ask your advice about something." The Senator coughed faintly over the telephone. He knew what that meant. Olympia had made up her mind. She never asked his advice until she had reached a conclusion.

"Del, what do you think of my bringing these poor dear little children back to Washington to live with us a while?"

The Senator cleared his throat. "Wait till I wipe my glasses," he said.

"He's so tickled he's crying," she whispered loudly to the girls. "That's the way he cries—he wipes his glasses."

"Olympia," the Senator said, and he spoke brokenly, for he was deeply moved, "that's the best idea you ever had in your life. Of course, our home is their home. Of course they are our children from this on. Who has a better right to them than we have? I'll get things ready for them right away. I'll call Hilda. After all, what is a home without children?"

Aunt Olympia began to cry, sniffily, from pure joy.

"You're wrong!" she boomed, when she could control her voice. "It's a mother!"

"What's that?"

"A mother!" she repeated. "A mother!"

"Who's a mother?"

"Your quotation is wrong," she said exasperatedly, between blowings of a very red nose and dabbing at her eyes with the receiver. "It's 'What is home without a mother?' Not 'children.' "

"Well, that's all right. We'll be a mother to them. You bring them right along, Ollie. I'll go down first thing in the morning and get them some toys and things, to make them feel at home."

"Get them some what?"

"Some toys. Some playthings. Toys!"

"Listen, you silly dunce," she roared, scarlet with pleasure. "They're not babies! They're young ladies. They're twenty-one years old, and nineteen and six— seventeen minus something or other," she corrected herself hastily, to please the listening Limpy. "They're not infants! Don't order cradles for them."

"Children, that's all they are! They've got to be amused. I'll get them some tennis rackets and bicycles—"

"Since when, you idiot, do young ladies play tennis and ride bicycles in the dead of winter?"

"That's so, too," he admitted feebly. Then he brightened. "Skates! That's what! I'll get them skates. Are they too big for sleds?"

"Del, you get nothing till I get home. You get nothing and you do nothing. You leave this to me. They just wanted me to find out if you want them! They don't want to impose on you!"

"Want them!" he ejaculated. "Impose on me? Why, the very idea! Let me speak to them," he said, in his sternest senatorial voice.

"Helen, here, Helen," said Aunt Olympia triumphantly. "You can see he wants you! He wants to speak to you. . . . Del, are you there, Del? This is Helen, she's the oldest. This is Helen!"

"H-hello, Senator," said Helen faintly.

The Senator coughed slightly. "My dear child," he began, and then added, "Wait till I wipe my glasses."

"What's that he said?" whispered Aunt Olympia anxiously.

"He said wait till he wipes his glasses."

"He's shedding tears of joy," said Aunt Olympia blandly. "That's the way he sheds tears. Just fogs up his glasses."

"Helen, my dear child, are you there?"

"Yes, Senator."

"Helen, my child—my children, for I am speaking to you all. You don't know how happy your aunt and I are

to have you come and live with us. As Olympia says, what is a mother without children—without a home, I mean. I guess I'm a little mixed up," he admitted, with an apologetic cackle of laughter that had a break of emotion in it. "You come right along. Our home is your home. And if you want to play tennis in the dead of winter, I'll get the snow shoveled off the courts for you. And if you want to ride bicycles, we'll have coasters put on 'em. You come right along. I'm telling Hilda to make up the beds and—"

"We really haven't decided yet," said Helen nervously. "We have to think it over. But it's wonderful of you to ask us."

"You let your Aunt Olympia do the deciding. I always let her do mine, and she does a good job of it. Now you give the other children a great big kiss from their old uncle and tell them to hurry along home and use those toys I'm going to order first thing in the morning. What train are you taking?"

Helen turned to her aunt. "He wants to know what train you're taking?"

"Give me the receiver." Olympia charged back into the conversation. "We don't know what train we're taking. The girls can't come for a couple of weeks—"

"Why not?" he demanded testily. "Why put off till next week what should have been done long ago?"

"Because Limpy flunked her math—"

"She what?"

"She flunked her math. Her math! Her math!"

"Ollie, have you had your teeth pulled? You're lisping. It sounds as if you're saying math."

"I am saying math, you silly dunce, and I haven't had

my teeth pulled and I'm not lisping. Never mind. . . . He never could get math either," she whispered to Limpy. "You take after him. . . . I'll send you a telegram, Del." And she hung up the receiver with a triumphant air. "You can see he wants you."

"He sounded very nice," said Helen.

"Yes, he's nice. As senators go, I think he's particularly nice. If he could just break himself of that silly habit of coughing instead of making a remark, and wiping his glasses instead of bursting right out into manly tears, it would be an improvement. But he's nice. You'll like the Senator."

"I—I really don't know what to say, Aunt Olympia," said Helen distractedly. "It is so—important—"

"Of course it's important. Don't say anything. Just think it over and then come, that's all. Think of dear little Limpy here! Think of Adele. Think of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. This may be your last chance to see the real inside goings-on in Washington, for if what we hear from home is true, the Senator is due for a fade-out this fall and this will be our last year in Washington."

And then, suddenly, before their eyes, an amazing transformation took place. From being tearful, fond and persuasive, Aunt Olympia became rigid and tense. Bones, or very hard muscles, appeared as if by magic under her ample curves. Her hands clenched and her dimples disappeared into knotty knuckles. The left corner of her mouth tightened and curled upward. The lid of her left eye went down until the lashes touched her cheek.

The girls, amazed, almost frightened, stared in speechless wonder for a moment. Then Helen found voice.

"You must be very tired, Auntie. Let's go to bed. We can talk it over tomorrow."

"Yes, let's go to bed," said Aunt Olympia. Even her voice had changed. It had dropped from a persuasive, emotional tremolo to guarded, guttural depth. "Yes, we'll talk it over tomorrow."

Later the girls came to know and to fear—but excitingly—this look of Aunt Olympia's. It signified that she had suddenly turned Machiavellian, had begun to play politics. Even the Senator quailed before that look.

Chapter II

On the next morning, the girls were shocked to see that Aunt Olympia retained the tense rigidity that had come upon her so suddenly the night before. She was quiet all morning. Not until they sat at luncheon did her expression change. Slowly then her features relaxed. The left corner of her mouth went down, her left eyelid went up to normal. Her pale blue eyes became childish, bland and slightly vacuous. An air of exaggerated casualness descended upon her like a mantle. If the girls had known her better, they would have realized that Aunt Olympia was now in her most dangerous mood. There was something she wanted to find out.

"Since when," she inquired presently, in a voice of studied nonchalance, "have grocery boys in Iowa begun making deliveries in neckties and gloves?"

For all the mild unconcern in her eyes, she did not overlook that a sudden electric wave, almost of warning, flashed briefly among the girls.

It was Limpy who answered.

Later, when Aunt Olympia knew the girls better, she would have known at once that because it was Limpy who answered, Limpy was least involved in the query. It was an act of unstudied teamwork, a defense mechanism, entirely sisterly and natural, unmentioned even between themselves, that the girls had developed for their mutual good.

Sometimes their father had inquired, half irritably, at breakfast, "What was all that racket going on last night around two o'clock? Got me so wide awake I never did get to sleep again."

Then Adele spoke swiftly. "Mother, I do think it is outrageous the way the Baileys keep their radio going all hours of the night. I suppose we can't complain though, since they are our own members."

Limpy followed promptly. "I am afraid I helped the racket along last night. I couldn't sleep either and went down cellar for some apples. I don't know what time it was, but a door blew shut on me and naturally there was a bit of noise."

"I am not entirely innocent myself," Helen finally vouchsafed. "Brick and I got into an argument and you know how arguments run on. I had no idea it was so late. And I do think the deacons might come through with a few nails for those squeaky stairs. I'm sorry if I wakened you."

But by the time the blame was traced squarely to Helen, the edge of their father's irritation had worn off.

Or their mother had said, "Girls, which of you broke the handle off that lovely crystal pitcher the Aid gave me?"

"Oh, Mother!" Helen cried regretfully. "I knew we should not put that pitcher in the icebox! I've said a dozen times it would get broken if we kept on."

"I might have cracked it the other day," admitted Adele. "I gave it a wallop on the faucet—purely accidental. But I didn't see any crack and I looked carefully."

"Maybe that was the little crash I heard when I shoved the milk bottle in this morning," Limpy added. "I heard

something give a sort of a sound but I never thought of the crystal pitcher."

So now, when Aunt Olympia inquired with such complete affectation of disinterest about the delivery of groceries, or, more particularly, of the one who made the delivery, Limpy's prompt reply proved her personal innocence.

"Oh, you mean Brick! He isn't the delivery boy! He owns the store!"

"It's the best store in town, too," added Adele.

"Iowa must be going to the dogs," remarked Aunt Olympia, blandly, "when the owners of the best stores deliver their own groceries. Can't they afford a truck?"

"Oh, they have two trucks," said Limpy hastily. "Brick doesn't really make the deliveries. He just leaves things here as a favor on his way home to luncheon. He lives out this way."

"They have a lovely house," said Helen belatedly. "They hired a florist landscaper to lay out their grounds."

"There's still money in groceries, darling," concluded Limpy, "even if—even if—" She remembered her aunt's state of politics. "Well, I don't suppose anybody would call a grocer an economic royalist."

"How old are you, Limpy?" asked Aunt Olympia again, with more pronounced casualness.

"Seventeen," came promptly.

"Sixteen and a half, says the Bible," corrected Adele.

"Why, Auntie?"

"Oh, I just wondered!"

That evening, when she again brought up the subject of their going with her to Washington, there was nothing nonchalant, nothing casual, about her. She was taut, in

the throes of politics. She listened intently, sitting motionless, with unchanging expression, to Helen's halfhearted recital of the difficulties in their way. In the first place, they could not make any move at all until Limpy had finished this last term of high school.

"That's soon enough. You can come then," said Aunt Olympia agreeably.

Then there was the matter of their furniture, all their household goods. Some of it was badly worn and of no value; the secondhand store could have that. But there were other things that the girls loved and prized: things they would like to keep for the future and divide among them. If they took a set of light-housekeeping rooms, they could use these for furnishing.

"Mrs. Cox says we can store everything in her attic and it won't cost us a cent. . . . If we want to," contributed Adele.

In the end, it simmered down to two facts: that while Helen was obliged honestly to admit it was a marvelous opportunity for Adele and Limpy, who were young and whose lives were still unplanned, her own future lay right there in Iowa where she already had her teacher's certificate; and that her sisters would not go east without her.

"But there's a future beyond teaching school," said Aunt Olympia. "There's the real future—marriage: every woman's real career. What eligible men have you in a one-horse town like this? You girls have the looks and the style and the personality to marry anybody—anybody at all; diplomats, millionaires, senators—"

"Cabinet members?" questioned Limpy interestedly.

"Unfortunately, there are no vacancies right now. But

we'll bear it in mind for the future. You can marry anybody—anybody at all."

Again she noted the faint flash, half-questioning, half-warning, that glinted from girl to girl.

"But you can't marry anybody," continued Aunt Olympia, "without meeting him first. You've got to have contacts. There are no contacts here. Washington is the place for contacts."

"Even though I dread separation from the girls," said Helen, "I see the advantages for them and—I wish—I even urge them to go without me."

"That's out," said Limpy.

"Together we stay or together we go," added Adele.

"To tell you the truth, girls," Aunt Olympia began guardedly, "while I love you devotedly and want you to come with me for yourselves alone, still—to tell the truth—I really need you. It may be that you three girls, young, innocent, pretty, can be the Senator's salvation. The Senator's salvation and my salvation."

The girls stared at her in startled silence.

"The salvation of both of us," she repeated firmly.

"Do you mean," gasped Limpy, "that—you are on the verge of a divorce—and want us to help you—win him back?"

Aunt Olympia broke into hearty laughter. "Lord, no! It's not domestically I need you. I can handle the Senator. It is politically you can be of help."

"Politically!"

"We don't know a thing about politics!"

"We're not even Democrats!"

"I'm the only one old enough to vote anyhow, and it will be my first," said Helen.

"It's not your votes we need. It's your vote-getting quality, your pull." Aunt Olympia's left lid reduced her eye to a mere squint. "The Senator comes up again this fall and he's got a tough fight on his hands." She warmed to her subject. "And do you know who's doing the Senator all this dirt? It's a man the Senator made! He simply made him! He was nothing but a small-town preacher, and a poor one at that, until the Senator persuaded him to go into politics!"

"I don't seem to get it," admitted Helen. "Perhaps I'm not very political. If the Senator made him and they're in the same party—"

"It's quite complicated," explained Aunt Olympia kindly. "The Senator made him all right. But they're not in the same party. There was a split in our party and the Governor was trying to get control and naturally the Senator couldn't support him. So he made a deal with the Republicans and promised to support Brother Wilkie for governor if they would run him, and they did and he was elected. The ingrate! The louse! The Senator planned his entire campaign for him. He even put up the money—most of it himself and got his friends to contribute the rest. He taught him all the tricks. He lent him our own publicity man, the best campaign man that ever lived. And what happened?"

"What did?" asked the girls, breathlessly, in one voice.

"Well, two years ago, when the Senator had pledged himself to somebody else and asked Brother Wilkie—the

Governor, that is—to withdraw like a gentleman, he wouldn't do it. He ran again. He used all the tricks the Senator had taught him—and our publicity man—and won!"

"But if he's governor, that doesn't interfere with the Senator, does it?"

"Ah, but now the bug's really got him! He wants to be senator. He aims to be president someday, we all know that. He doesn't even deny it. He's come out against the Senator and is putting up the fight of his life to beat us at our own game."

"But we couldn't do a thing in the world about that," said Helen. "We don't know the first thing about politics. We're just three green little corn-fed minister's daughters from good old Iowa."

"Congress," said Aunt Olympia, bitterly, "is all eaten up with ministers. And as for ministers' children, Washington is lousy with them. I'm expecting a constitutional amendment any day now that only ministers and their offspring are eligible to run for Congress."

"But what could we do about it, Auntie? Not even I could vote in your state!"

"You don't have to vote. Your looks will turn the trick; your looks and your innocence and—and your general pathos. Brother Wilkie, the Governor, that is, the snake-in-the-grass, has seven of the most unspeakable little brats that ever lived. He only had five when the Senator first ran him, but when he saw what an asset they were in a campaign he got busy right away and had two more. Some of his friends say he was all set for triplets the last time, but the Lord let him down on it. He campaigns with them.

The Senator put him up to it in the first place but he's running it into the ground. He takes the whole kit and boodle of them right along with him and has them sit on the platform and eat peanuts and even the youngest one—the ugliest little worm I ever saw in my life—has been taught to wave his lollypop and shout, 'Vote for Papa! Vote for Papa!' "

The girls tried considerately but unsuccessfully to repress their laughter.

"Oh, I admit it's funny," Aunt Olympia acknowledged grudgingly. "It was good and funny until he began working it against the Senator. And that wasn't enough! You know what he did next? Listen to this now. This just shows you what the church stands for—er—when it goes into politics. Not satisfied with the seven brats, last campaign he dug up some old hag from someplace, calls her his great-aunt, a wrinkled, gnarled, crippled old beldame who hobbles around on a cane and pretends she can't hear without an ear trumpet. He takes her stumping with him, too, and she bangs on the back of the chair with her tin trumpet and shouts through it, when he makes a good point, 'That's my nevvy! Tell 'em, Nevvy!' In my opinion, it's a megaphone to shout through and no ear trumpet at all. And what's more, I don't believe she's his aunt. I think he—or that devil, Len Hardesty—dug her up out of some graveyard or old ladies' home, for she's never around except during campaigns, and she certainly doesn't look like him or any of the seven brats."

"Oh, I see what you're getting at," said Limpy brightly. "You want us to hobble around on canes and shout through tin trumpets and take the shine off the beldame."

"Oh, no I don't. Not by a long shot." Aunt Olympia relaxed then and leaned back in her chair, regarding them with a smile of blissful contentment. "I just want you to be three dear sweet innocent little orphans—pretty ones!—that the Senator and I have taken into our home to live with us." Her eyes narrowed suddenly. "You'd better stick to mourning, I suppose, though in the main I'm against mourning. I don't consider it religious. . . . Yes, mourning, all right. But we'll soften it. Queen Elizabeth did that to do her mourning in Paris, though, in my opinion, Paris is the last place in the world to go and do your mourning in."

"But that was an affair of state, wasn't it?"

"So's this. Our state. And election year, to boot. . . . Let me see. Yes, we'll make it black and white, and white and black."

"I wonder if I'm getting color-blind," said Adele. "They sound just alike to me."

"Not a bit of it. It'll be mostly black with touches of white for Helen, because she's the oldest; and mostly white with touches of black for Limpy, because she's no more than a child. And it'll be about half and half for you, Adele, because black and white is very becoming and will set off your good looks."

"Then all we have to do is wear black and white and white and black and sit on the platform and wave lollypops?" asked Limpy, quite fascinated at the prospect.

"And especially, you must be very, very affectionate toward the Senator," said Aunt Olympia thoughtfully, already mapping the campaign.

"But—what will the Senator think?" ejaculated Helen,

appalled at the idea of showing affection toward a senatorial uncle by marriage she had never even seen.

Aunt Olympia smiled disarmingly. "He'll probably think times have improved no end," she said. "And you must not call him Senator. Never call him Senator. It's so stiff, so formal."

"It will seem strange to call him Uncle Alençon," mused Adele.

"Not Alençon," said Olympia decidedly. "Never Alençon. We've had trouble enough trying to live down that Alençon. They try to make out we're aristocrats because of that name, and nobody will vote for an aristocrat these days."

"It is an odd name, isn't it? Is it French?"

"It's hellish," said Aunt Olympia frankly. "I think his mother was frightened by a piece of lace."

"How about just plain 'Unc'?" suggested Limpy.

"No. That's not fond enough. It must be something very, very fond."

"What do you call him, Auntie?"

"Oh, I call him Del. But that won't do. It's too flippant, in the first place, and it comes from Delaporte, his middle name, which, though not as bad as Alençon, is almost aristocratic, too. Alençon Delaporte Slopshire. Maybe his mother was scared by a dictionary or a French map. Uncle Del—no, it won't do! Uncle—Uncle Lancy!" she cried, in a bellow of triumph.

"Uncle—Lancy?"

"Yes. Kind of an offshoot from Alençon. Very clubby. Lancy! That's good. That's fine!"

"But—will he like that?"

"He will—when the votes are counted," said Aunt Olympia grimly.

It was hard for the girls to decide to make this very drastic change in their quiet, ordered lives. Helen was sure it would be good for Adele and Limpy; but for herself she clung to the old home, the old town, the old life. The girls refused to go without her. They agreed to think it over, quietly, dispassionately, for one more night; they would make their final decision on the morrow.

Although Aunt Olympia agreed cheerfully enough to the program of thinking-over, she was of no mind to let things rest there. She had no confidence in anyone's thinking but her own and was determined to clinch her arguments and insure a decision in her own favor. Since not even a political appeal for their campaign support had won them, it was clear to her extremely logical mind that the decision could be attained in only one way.

She prepared for bed leisurely. She gave the curving under-chin a dozen or more extra strokes for good measure. She donned two dressing gowns, the handsomest one, trimmed with marabou, on the outside for effect, with a soft flannel beneath for warmth, for the old parsonage was not as warmly heated as her Shoreham apartment in Washington. Then, considering that sufficient time had elapsed to allow the girls to be settled in their beds for the night, she cautiously opened her door and listened. The house was enwrapped in silence; but two small slits of light under closed doors down the corridor showed that the girls had not retired.

Aunt Olympia, panting pleasurably, tiptoed noiselessly down the hall. A low murmur of voices from one closed

door assured her that Helen and Adele were talking things over. But she passed on and tapped softly at Limpy's door, opening it immediately to a very narrow crack.

"Limpy?" she whispered.

"Yes, come in. Oh, it's you, Auntie!"

Limpy was sitting erect in the middle of her bed, her arms clasped about her upraised knees: slim, tragic youth, making a show of bravery in scarlet pajamas—a bravery belied by the tears that clung to her lashes.

She did not move as Aunt Olympia tiptoed softly in, fingers to her lips enjoining silence, and sat down on the foot of the bed.

But it was Limpy who opened the conversation.

"Aunt Olympia, isn't it—terrible—and terrifying—that things change so quickly? Oh, so quickly! It gives you such an—unsure—feeling. To think that just last week our life was so settled, so taken care of! We knew just what we were going to do for—oh, any number of years! And now—a week later—the whole world is just reeling and rocking over our heads." There was a faint flash of her impish smile. "My English teacher would say that 'under our feet' would be more consistent. But it's so—terrifying."

Aunt Olympia fished in the voluminous folds of marabou for a handkerchief to mop her eyes. Something about Limpy moved her swiftly to emotion: tears, now; but in normal times, it would be laughter.

"No, Limpy," she said, trying to quench the quivering of her under-chin with a rough finger, "it isn't terrifying. You mustn't let it be terrifying. You must think it is kind and beautiful and rather inspiring; that changes come so

quickly, without warning. Just suppose you had all known, you girls and your parents, that this terrible thing would happen and could not be prevented. Think what a heart-breaking week that would have been! No, you must just feel that however settled life is today, tomorrow it may all be changed. If today is bad, probably tomorrow will be better." Her own philosophy brightened her. "Take the Senator for instance. A week ago, I was pretty sure the Senator was licked. Now I can hardly wait for the campaign to open, I'm so anxious to show them my new bag of tricks."

"I doubt if Helen will go," said Limpy wisely. "She's more settled than Adele and I. She feels that home is here. And Adele won't go without Helen and I won't go without both of them."

"Limpy, I want to make a deal with you," said Aunt Olympia, her voice sinking to a congressional whisper, after the fashion of making deals. . . . "It's cold in here. Pass me a corner of that blanket, will you? . . . Limpy, I've been sizing you girls up and I've been sizing this town and all these people up, and I'm a good sizer-up. For instance! Helen is a perfect angel, too good for her own good. She will make any sacrifice in the world for Adele and you. Adele is the most beautiful thing I ever laid my eyes on, and anybody as beautiful as that doesn't need any other asset. People will put up with her all her life for her looks, though so far, I must say, she's easy to put up with, in addition to her looks. You're just a child and haven't really come into your real looks, but you're smart; you're smart as the dickens. And there are people who like smartness even better than looks."

"I wish you'd talk that over with my math prof. You heard what he did to me last semester!"

"Good! Now, Limpy, you've not only got my name, but you've got a lot of my good horse sense and I'm going to talk plain facts to you. Can you take it?"

"Yes, I can take it, but my reputation is that I give as good as I get."

"Good! I can take it, too. Now I want to make a deal with you. You're seventeen, minus. A year here or there, one place or another, doesn't mean a thing to you. You've got time ahead of you for everything and every place. But this is the last chance that Helen, and probably Adele, will have to get out and go places and meet people and see things. When she settles down here to teach school, Helen'll end up by marrying some grocery boy or farmhand and there's an end of her. Now I've got nothing against grocery boys and farmhands. If she wants them, she can have them. But you—you alone—can give her a chance to try other things first; so she can make up her mind what she wants and know what she's getting. As for Adele, that girl—well, that girl— Well, you've got imagination! You can see what a year in Washington can do for her—with her looks—and the Senator's contacts."

"And the deal?" Limpy reminded her drily.

"I'm coming to that. It won't mean so much to you, Limpy; I realize that. You're still a schoolgirl. But if, for their sakes, you'll work with me and try to put this thing across and help me out for a year—and keep yourself sort of in the background until I get them settled—for you're smarter than both of them put together—well, if you'll do that, Limpy, when the year is up, I'll stand by you

and back you up in anything you want to do, and I'll pay the bills. You can travel, or go to college, or go into society, or go to the devil; and I'll buy your ticket."

"I think you've got something there," said Limpy thoughtfully. "But how can we swing it?"

"By pretending that it is for your sake and yours alone; and that you won't go a step without them, for a year, at least. Talk up the educational advantages of good schools, eastern experience, political contacts—all for your own exclusive good. They'll fall for it."

"But, Auntie, suppose we make this deal—and they go—and then are unhappy there?"

Aunt Olympia lapsed immediately into tears. "Limpy, they can leave in a minute if we can't make them happy. They can go and I won't say a word. It—it would just break me all up to see them—unhappy—again, after this."

"Yes, I know, Auntie," said Limpy kindly. "Okay! Will do!"

"Shake!" said Aunt Olympia triumphantly. But instead of shaking hands she drew the slim, red-garbed little figure into her arms and held her very close. "You'd think I could have had—one—just one, Limpy, wouldn't you?" she said, brokenly.

"Well, by the time you get the three of us off your hands, you may decide you're pretty lucky after all," said Limpy, philosophically.

Still, Aunt Olympia was not satisfied. A three-cornered deal, though highly dangerous, often insured success where a mere double pact fell short. Aunt Olympia wanted absolute insurance on this, complete coverage.

She closed Limpy's door softly behind her and, panting

with approval of her own devious methods, tiptoed to that other door that showed a slit of light at the sill. The girls' murmurs were still faintly audible.

She opened the door.

"Girls?" she said, softly. "May I come in?"

The girls, older, more thoughtful perhaps than Limpy, bounded out of bed to receive her. They brought a chair for her and drew up a footstool. Helen turned the light so it would not reflect in her eyes.

"Girls," she said, "excuse me for intruding like this, but I want to make a deal with you and I don't want Limpy to know about it."

"It was nice of you to come, Auntie," said Helen politely. "We are so nervous and so keyed-up we cannot sleep anyhow."

"Well, I want to make a deal with you, and I'm not going to beat around the bush about it. I've set my heart on giving Limpy a chance in life, a big chance, and I'm not going to mince words. That child has character; she has personality; she has what it takes. I want her to go to the best schools, to travel, to meet people. There's something in her and I want to have a hand in developing it. Now, girls, you must realize that you can't remain together all your lives. You will go to school in different places; when you go to work you will be separated; when you are married, you will be more widely divided. Your mother and I were as close as you three are, and look how we drifted apart. But right now, Limpy, so young, so sad, will never go with me and leave you. That's why I ask you, for her sake, to make this sacrifice for a year, to help her adjust herself to her future life of independence. I know that

coming to Washington doesn't mean much to you two. You are older. Your plans are made. You know what you want. You have already charted your courses. But Limpy is still at sea and I want to see her heading for the right port. Now, if you girls will make this sacrifice, for her sake, just for this one year to let her try it out, I promise to do everything in my power to make you as happy as can be and give you good and valuable experience. The Senator—Uncle Lancy, I mean—is well enough off; he can afford anything in reason. You can see the life in Washington, you can learn about politics and government—and modern women ought to know about those things. If you will come with me for this one year, you can do absolutely whatever you please after that. You can come back and teach school and marry some grocery boy if you want to; or you can take a trip around the world—at Del's expense—I mean Uncle Lancy's. Adele can go to any school she wants to and I'll foot the bills. All I ask is for you to give up this one year—for Limpy."

"There won't be any argument about the future?" asked Helen in her soft voice. "There will be no ill feeling about it—if, after this one year—we come back and take up life as we want to?"

"Absolutely and irrevocably. But after one year, I think, I hope, maybe I can keep Limpy. And the Senator will make her his heir, you know—that's something. He's only got cousins on his side and he doesn't even like them."

"You're sure he won't dig up some trumpeting great-aunt you don't know about and gum up the works?" said Adele mischievously.

"Not the Senator! He lets me do the digging up, and

my taste doesn't run to trumpeting aunts." Her complacency was sublime. "I would certainly like to see Len Hardesty's face when he hears about my orphans!"

"Len Hardesty?" The girls had difficulty keeping pace with Aunt Olympia's swift flights.

"A snake-in-the-grass if ever lived one. He used to be our publicity man and the Senator out of the bigness of his heart, like the fool he is, turned him over to Brother Wilkie—the Governor—for his first campaign and now he's signed him up to a contract and we can't get him back. He has to go on working for the Governor and against us—the Governor and the brats and the trumpeter—and bites the hand that would be glad to feed him, for he can't be beaten at his racket. In my opinion," she added confidentially, "it was Len Hardesty who dug up the beldame and the ear trumpet. Brother Wilkie isn't smart enough to think that up. Len Hardesty's smart as the Old Nick."

"But why doesn't the Senator—"

"Uncle Lancy, darling."

"Uncle Lancy. Why doesn't he hire him back?"

"Because Brother Wilkie, as soon as he decided to run, signed Len to a contract to work for him all this year. . . . That's the church for you! Won't take a gentleman's word for anything. Makes him sign on the dotted line and threatens to fight it out in the courts. And you can't beat a preacher in the courts on anything short of murder! . . . Well, I just wanted to be frank with you, girls. I want you to know just where I stand. I know it doesn't mean much to you, personally, but it may mean the world to Limpy."

Aunt Olympia returned to her own room and retired to

bed in such a glow of contentment that she did not feel the cold. She would have been surprised, perhaps a little disconcerted, if she had known that, almost before her door was closed upon her, Helen was saying briskly.

"Well, we may as well settle this right now and then maybe we can get a little sleep. Let's have it out with Limpy."

Limpy still sat cross-legged and erect on her bed. She was smiling mistily.

"Girls," Helen began abruptly, "I want to make a deal with you."

"Helen!" cried Adele, with soft laughter in her voice. "Be careful! You're catching it! You're getting political!"

"We'll have to be political, every one of us, to hold our own with Aunt Olympia even halfway. . . . Now you realize, of course, that for purely personal and selfish reasons I do not want to go away from here at all. I hate terribly to leave Brick this year, when he's going to be all messed up in his first campaign and will most certainly want me near him. But I do realize it is a magnificent opportunity for both of you. I will go with you, with Aunt Olympia, on one condition."

"Aha! The deal! I smell a rat."

"Yes, the deal. You can see that absolutely without reason she has taken a violent dislike to Brick. If she knew he was running for Congress from this district—and going to be elected, too!—she would always be against him and make fun of him and call him a delivery boy. Even when he gets to Washington she will look down on him. But she has hardly so much as caught a glimpse of him and she doesn't even know his name. If he is elected—and he

will be!—she will meet him as a new Member from Iowa and she'll forget the grocery store. I want you to promise not even to mention his name to her. Don't tell her a thing about him. And don't in any circumstances let her find out that we are engaged."

"But Brick's so swell, Helen," protested Limpy.

"All the more reason for not inciting her prejudice. She can't help liking him if she meets him under different circumstances."

"But won't he think it very strange, Helen, if we don't have him meet her? I thought you had asked him for dinner tomorrow night on purpose."

"So I have. But I shall un-ask him tomorrow."

"But won't it hurt his feelings? I wouldn't hurt Brick's feelings for the world!"

"Oh, I'll take care of that. I'll just tell him the truth. And he can see that it would be wicked for you girls to miss this opportunity." Helen cocked her head on one side and slowly winked her left eye.

Adele laughed again. "There you go, Helen; more politics," she said accusingly.

"Yes. I'll go, and I'm going to make the most of it, too. Brick is going to be elected to Congress and I am going to marry him and, though she doesn't know it, Aunt Olympia is going to teach me the political racket from the ground up. I'm going to make a business of learning everything she knows—and she knows plenty. Then when we are married, I can be a real help to Brick. And she won't object to my marrying him when he's a congressman. Is it a deal?"

"Okay by me," said Limpy cheerfully. And added more

soberly, "It would seem very strange to keep on living here—outside the parsonage. And we wouldn't be very happy alone—just the three of us—without them."

"Yes, I feel that way, too," said Adele. "So it's a deal, Helen. But I am afraid I am the only one who's going to get much excitement out of Washington. Poor Limpy will have to plug along in school—poor Helen will be plugging at politics, plus the pangs of parting from Brick—and only little Adele will be free to enjoy things."

"We do not begrudge it to you, darling," Helen said. "You deserve it. I have so often wished you could—be away from here for a while. Mother wished it, too. We often talked of it. You are so sweet, Adele, and so very pretty. But oh, Adele, do be careful, won't you? You're almost too good-looking, and everybody says that even quite respectable men get to be perfect devils about women when they go to Congress. That's why I didn't want Brick to run in the first place!"

Aunt Olympia received the girls' quiet announcement of their acceptance of her offer with a rush of happy tears and immediately put in a call for the Senator to inform him of the good news. It was no news to the Senator. As soon as Aunt Olympia had said she wanted to bring them, the Senator had considered the fact already accomplished. He did think she might have handled the affair more expeditiously; he could see no reason at all for leaving the girls behind her to settle up their small affairs. Olympia could certainly have settled any affairs they might have in the two days that had elapsed since the funeral.

Aunt Olympia herself had not been too well pleased about returning home without them. She had a desperate

fear, from an experience with constituents longer and more intimate than with orphaned young nieces, of last-minute mind-changings. But she contented herself, of necessity, with bolstering her case by making separate and secret deals with each of the girls to wire her, collect, at the first mere hint of a mind-changing on the part of any one of them, promising to fly out immediately, in any weather, at any cost, to salvage her precious campaign material.

Immediately after breakfast on that happy day of Aunt Olympia's great triumph, Helen quietly prepared to hurry off to town. But she did not escape the watchfulness of Aunt Olympia's pale blue eyes.

"Going out, Helen?" she inquired crisply.

"For a while. To do a little shopping and a few errands."

"Well, you might tell that delivery boy to put on his gloves and his new necktie and bring me a nickel's worth of gumdrops," said Aunt Olympia.

Helen laughed good-naturedly. "You could save four cents by getting a peppermint stick instead," was her reply.

Aunt Olympia liked that. Sense of humor. It was a great asset. With youth and good looks, Aunt Olympia considered the combination unbeatable.

Brick Landis did not come to dinner that night, and the next order of groceries was delivered by truck. Aunt Olympia noticed that, too, but refrained from comment. But at luncheon she remarked, with her most elaborate assumption of nonchalance, "I hope you girls are not mixed up with beaux or anything like that."

Limpy answered quickly. "Oh, Auntie, darling, is that the low opinion you have of us? Why, even I have had my admirers since the day I stepped out of the cradle. And

if you take a good look at Adele, you can't help realizing that she has followers."

"Our whole church knows that we three girls are to thank for the presence of two young tenors and a good basso in our choir every Sunday night," added Adele. "And if you aren't going to let us have admirers in Washington, I shan't go a step. They're my besetting habit. And you can't teach an old girl to get along without beaux."

Their frankness was almost sufficient to disarm Aunt Olympia. She was highly pleased. "You can have all the admirers you want. But until after election I wish you'd let me pick them out. I don't want you to get off on the wrong foot. One mis-admirer has wrecked more campaigns than you could shake a stick at." Aunt Olympia smirked at the girls' quick laughter for her pat coinage of "mis-admirer." She thought it was good herself.

"Well, don't be arbitrary," said Limpy. "At least consider our tastes. I like wise-crackers, Adele takes them romantic, and Helen wants them to have a purpose in life and honorable intentions."

"I'll bear it in mind." Aunt Olympia liked the turn the conversation had taken. If she had known the girls better it would have put her definitely on guard. "Anyhow, no preachers. They're so apt to turn on you—politically, I mean. And no newspapermen. Especially, no newspapermen."

"But I have always heard that newspapermen are so interesting," said Helen.

"They're too damn interesting," said Aunt Olympia. "You don't dare open your mouth to them. If you should mention to a good newspaperman like Len Hardesty—working for the Opposition—that it is a foul day, he would

print it in big caps that you are finding fault with God. And if you say it is a nice day, he says you are giving the Senator credit for the weather."

The girls laughed. Their laughter gratified Aunt Olympia. The Senator, for all his good points, never laughed at her remarks. Usually he coughed deprecatingly and looked mildly pained. Sometimes he did worse. He coughed deprecatingly and said, "She's joking, you know." That remark had taken the edge off many of Aunt Olympia's most biting comments.

So the girls' response in bubbling laughter excited her to more exaggerated flights.

"The only thing I really liked about Len Hardesty," she said, "was that he knew a good crack when he heard it. He didn't exactly laugh but he looked jealous and said he wished he had said that and he would be saying it next. He was, too. When he was with us he used to spend hours with me, getting copy. 'Go on, now, Ollie,' he'd say—he calls me Ollie. 'Go on, now, Ollie, be good and dirty. Give me some copy.' "

"Does he call you Ollie?" The girls were plainly horrified.

"When a newspaperman calls you by your first name, it's a sign you're somebody. They don't waste their familiarity on little fry."

"Make a note of that, Helen," said Limpy, slily. "That's very important."

And then, to Aunt Olympia's great surprise, though she tried to laugh it off, Helen flushed deeply and looked confused. Aunt Olympia puzzled a good deal over that. She thought back, carefully, over just what had been said but she couldn't find anything in it to blush about.

Chapter III

Senator Slopshire did not wait for the return of Aunt Olympia to begin getting ready for the children. Immediately after hanging up the receiver, and hardly waiting long enough to wipe the moisture from his glasses, he called the servants' quarters on the first floor and asked their maid, Hilda, to come up right away.

"What's the matter, Senator? You sick?" she asked dourly.

"No, I'm not sick. I cannot discuss the matter over the telephone. Come immediately."

Hilda dressed hastily, with considerable show of irritation, and went up. Hilda was a tall, angular, unhappy-looking Scandinavian. Aunt Olympia described her as a "sour Swede." Next to being an almost superlative housekeeper and cook, disapproval was Hilda's outstanding characteristic. When friends in Washington expressed surprise at Aunt Olympia's loyal retention of Hilda in the District where colored girls from the South could be had at half the wage, Aunt Olympia explained, with her usual frankness:

"There's no appreciable colored vote in our state, but we have several large and influential Scandinavian settlements."

As a matter of fact, they could hardly have got along without Hilda. She took entire charge of their apartment in Washington during their residence there and assumed

the same responsibility for the household when they were at home. She cooked, she cleaned, she marketed, she sewed. She even darned the Senator's socks, frowning disapproval with every stitch. She obeyed every order she received, did everything she was told—and did it better than Olympia could possibly have told her—and gloomily disapproved of all they did and all they said.

She found the Senator standing distractedly in the center of the floor rubbing his glasses. He put them on at sight of her and began to give orders.

"Now, we'll have to get beds made up for them and we'll have to have in breakfast cereals and nourishing food and order more milk."

Hilda did not show surprise; she had always considered him mildly crazy anyhow.

"For the children," he explained belatedly. "Our poor dear children are coming to live with us."

"I'm not at all sure," said Hilda frowning darkly, "that the management here wants any more children cluttering up the hallways and scratching furniture."

"I don't know just where we're going to put beds for the little tykes," he said. "Mrs. Slopshire wasn't very explicit."

"What time they getting in?" asked Hilda.

"I don't know yet. Two or three days, I suppose. She said something about a week but there's no use waiting."

"I'll attend to the beds and I'll order oatmeal. Good night, Senator," said Hilda coldly and withdrew.

The Senator dressed nervously and went downstairs to talk things over with the management. It was only eleven o'clock and certainly no time should be lost.

The manager was a more sympathetic auditor than Hilda. He agreed with the Senator that the children's place was certainly right there in the Shoreham with the Senator and suggested fixing up a nice nursery adjoining their apartment. He was even more enthusiastic about the matter when the Senator got around to explaining that it wasn't exactly a nursery that would be required, since the poor dear orphans ranged upward from nearly seventeen to twenty-one. He agreed to all the Senator's suggestions: that there should be more plain food served and a lesser amount of high seasonings and rich French sauces; to see that the detectives kept a close watch, particularly on his floor, to prevent possible abductions; to guarantee that the pool be emptied frequently and scientifically disinfected, the Senator feeling it would be a grievous embarrassment to him if one of his orphans should contract athlete's foot; and to watch the entire clientele with strict attentiveness so that no obnoxious individuals should seize opportunity to drum up acquaintance with the children.

The manager of the Shoreham was used to dealing with senatorial patronage, and had learned from long and profitable experience that the only way to get along with officeholders is to agree wholeheartedly and even respectfully to every word they utter, and then go right ahead running the Shoreham on its ordinary efficient basis. He did not even bat an eye at the Senator's anxiety about the innocence—and the consequent necessity for paternal watch-care—of three orphan girls ranging from seventeen up. The Shoreham knew a lot more about girls than Senator Slopshire. But, as the manager philosophically

concluded, "What the Senator doesn't know is certainly no business of mine."

The Senator was pretty well pleased with himself when he returned to his apartment. He felt that he had accomplished a good deal. But he was far too excited to sleep. He tried balancing his checkbook to while away the time, but found it in such involved condition that he gave up and contented himself with writing out a preliminary check for each of the girls, Helen, Adele and Limpy. Then he took the *Congressional Record* and went to bed and fell asleep immediately.

His enthusiasm did not wane overnight. He was on the subject again before breakfast the next morning.

"I'm not sure we get enough sun here for children," he complained to Hilda. "I'll speak to the management about it. . . . We'd better get our fresh eggs from the country hereafter. . . . Remind me, Hilda, to ask the Health Department to send me their books on bringing up children."

He arrived early at his office in the Senate Office Building and informed his secretaries and clerks that he wanted things straightened up around there and put in good order without delay.

"The children will be down here with me a good deal," he said, "and I want them to get the habit of orderliness at an early age. And you'd better order in some good magazines and books so if they get tired they'll have something on hand to amuse them. And call the custodian right away and tell him I need more chairs, and I want good chairs and comfortable chairs. Some of these government chairs would give a young back curvature of the spine. They almost give me curvature of the spine."

He suggested to his fellow committee members that he would like them to hurry along and clear up the calendar as fast as they could, as he would have to spend a great deal of time with his children from this on.

He went shopping, too, and had a great many things sent up, most of which Hilda returned without comment. He read all the advertisements designed to attract "young ladies"; "what the girls are wearing," "these for the sweet young things." One in particular caught his eye. "All the smart young gals are wearing dirndls this year." Dirndls? Dirndls!

"Dirndl!" he ejaculated. "Dirndl."

Hilda thought he was swearing until he showed her a picture of it.

"It's a dress," she said coldly.

"But they've always worn dresses," he remonstrated. "It can't be a mere dress."

"If that's a picture of it you're showing me," said Hilda, "it's a dress."

"I don't suppose they have them in Iowa," he said. "It's something new! I'll have a little surprise for them. I'll get them some dirndls."

But he had no success. After an hour explaining what he wanted and selecting what he thought were bright cheerful colors for sad children, he found that girls' dresses come not by age but by size.

On the whole it was a relief to him when Olympia returned home and he could turn things over to her. Olympia was ready. Having pondered certain matters deeply in her innermost consciousness all the way home by train, she was ripe for action.

"Del, I want to ask your advice about something. About those poor dear children. Do you think we should take a larger apartment or should we move into a house?"

The Senator beamed at her. "I thought of that very thing," he said. "Ask Hilda if I didn't. I think we should take a house, though it will be a great disappointment to the management for they can hardly wait till the children get here. . . . Still, I think we should take a house. Children should have a home and only a house is a home."

"An apartment is part of a house and home is what you make it," she contradicted him flatly. "And an apartment is closer together, more intimate. I want them to be intimate. I want them to get used to seeing you around and being with you and—if possible—to like you as if you were their very own. . . . Before the campaign starts," she added significantly.

It must be said for the Senator that never once had he remotely thought of the children as latent campaign material.

"Oh, they've got plenty of time to get used to me," he said mildly.

"Well, it took me a good many years to get used to you and even now sometimes I'm surprised. Very much surprised! Besides, a hotel apartment is more accessible. Accessible to newspapermen and photographers as well as constituents. . . . Fortunately, they photograph well. . . . Yes, you're right, Del. We'd better take a larger apartment and stay where we are. This year at least. Next year is another year."

Their talk during those intervening days was all of the children. The Senator wiped his glasses without inter-

mission during a full hour while Olympia told him the sad details of the tragedy and the funeral. He did not brighten until she added thoughtfully:

"As Limpy says, it's just terrifying the way things happen so out of a clear sky. But as I said to Limpy, there's always something to look forward to. I was all cut up—I was terribly cut up—about this horrible tragedy." Her chin quivered a little and tears flooded her eyes. "And yet just look! Nothing else in the world could have given us those children."

"We'll be very good to them," said the Senator. "I'll buy them anything they want." The Senator's sole idea of being good to children was to buy them things.

"Del," Olympia said, almost pleadingly, "I want you to help me about something." That shocked the Senator. He was used to having his advice asked when Olympia had her mind made up. He was used to receiving orders for co-operation or for the carrying out of plans. For Olympia to ask his help, ask it pleadingly, was something new.

"Helen," she explained, tearfully, "is going home next winter and marry a grocery store. She doesn't know I know it, so kindly do not make any comments about it. She's of age and it's nobody's business but her own. Adele is so beautiful that she's bound to be gobbled up immediately and that's an end of her. But Del," Olympia began to cry softly, which so distressed the Senator that he set at once to wiping his glasses though he had no idea what she was crying about, "Del, there's Limpy! If we work this thing right, we can have Limpy! She's only sixteen; she calls it seventeen minus, but she's only sixteen.

If we make her happy and she learns to like us, we can have her. I—Del, I never wanted anything so much in my life." And she fell to crying again.

The Senator didn't even cough. "Ollie," he said firmly, "if you want that child, you can have her. You deserve her, Ollie. If she turns out to be a nice child and you want her, you can have her."

"She's a grand child, Del. She's just grand! And named after me, too. . . . You'd think she might like me all right, wouldn't you? . . . They're all nice children," she admitted, rather grudgingly. "Helen is a little pig-headed. You wouldn't think a person as angelic as Helen could be so pig-headed about a delivery boy. Adele's nice, too. I wouldn't have believed such a beauty could be so nice if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. . . . But Limpy—Del, Limpy is the cockiest, bravest little thing you ever saw. She's—well, it made me sick to have to come away and leave her even for three weeks. I kept wanting all the time to pick her up and start running with her."

"Do you want her as much as that, Ollie?" he asked, rather awkwardly. They had been married a long time and sweet speeches between them had come to seem artificial and affected, but he really thought a great deal of Olympia; he was actually fond of her. "Ollie, you're all right! And anything you want as much as that, I'm going to see that you get!"

"It's not as simple as that," she said ruefully. "But Del, I give you my word, I—I want Limpy so much that I'd rather have her than have you lick that damn preacher. I'd rather have her than the whole Senate and the House thrown in. I'd rather have her than the White House!"

That settled it for the Senator. Limpy was virtually their child.

Aunt Olympia occupied herself until the girls' arrival by a systematic procedure which she called "building them up." There were details to be attended to, of course; taking a larger apartment, for instance; laying in additional household supplies; sending back almost daily the curious assortment of gifts the Senator sent up in advance of their coming. But in the main, she devoted herself to "building them up." She saw everyone, she accepted every invitation, she resumed attendance at all her neglected clubs. She gave a large luncheon. She even went calling on just the right people. She talked constantly of "my poor dear children." She showed pictures of them, the most flattering ones. She apologized for her constant rush by saying she wanted to get everything of a social nature off her calendar before the poor dear children arrived. "Naturally, then, my place will be with them. They are very sad. Such a tragedy! But their uncle and I will do what we can to comfort them."

Every word, every gesture, was deliberately planned to whet interest, to arouse sympathy, to insure a profusion of polite courtesies with attendant publicity.

She wrote letters to her friends at home—voters, every one!—recounting the tragedy to the last gory adjective. And invariably added, "We shall have our three dear little nieces with us this summer. Naturally, they will make their home with us. I do want them to find new interest in life and come gradually out from this terrible shadow that has so darkened their beautiful youth. I know you will help me."

Due largely to these tireless and effectual preliminaries, the Senator got a very good press on his benign adoption of the three young orphans. He, along with Olympia and a crowd of newspapermen and photographers, met them on their arrival at Union Station. Uncle Lancy was photographed with them in many interesting poses; kissing Limpy, the youngest; patting the grave Helen paternally on the shoulder; chucking the beautiful Adele under her highly photographic chin. He was photographed, too, wiping the moisture from his glasses with a very large, very white handkerchief. It was genuine moisture. The picture was appropriately captioned, "Senator Weeps Over Pretty, Pathetic Young Wards."

Even Aunt Olympia pronounced the arrival a complete success.

The girls, though touched by the tender warmth, the unmistakably sincere sympathy of the Senator's attitude, were shy with him at first. Even with persistent prodding by Aunt Olympia and prompt corroboration by the Senator, it was not easy to call him "Uncle Lancy." They avoided calling him anything whenever possible. The Senator's very appearance had been a surprise to them. They had known former Senator Dickinson, Republican, slightly. They had even met Senator Gillette, though a Democrat. They were large, handsome men, rather fatherly, almost benign, in appearance. The girls had vaguely expected all senators to be cut on that same pattern, except perhaps McAdoo, whose pictures flatly belied such claim.

Senator Slopshire was neither of those types. He was neither large, nor tall, nor handsome, being instead rather jauntily rotund with a ruddy pink skin. He was slightly

bald and the top of his head was of a ruddy pinkness. He was definitely dapper, punctilious in every detail of dress, manner and speech.

The girls found, to their delighted relief, that, for all her robust energy, Aunt Olympia was easy to live with. She was always alert, always humorously sarcastic, even bitter, but her pleasure in the girls' presence was obvious and she was flattered to rosy flushes by their spontaneous laughter at her remarks. She gave them almost unlimited freedom. She said that, in her opinion, "people should do as they pleased." If they wanted to get up for breakfast, they could. If they didn't, they could stay abed. If they wanted to come in when there were callers, she was glad to have them; if they were disinclined, she made voluble excuse for them. Best of all, she was not snoopy and she never pried. Anything that came naturally within range of her eyes or ears went immediately into her storehouse of knowledge and was used to telling effect. But she never snooped.

Helen sometimes wondered uneasily if all this "doing as she pleased" was quite the best training for Limpy, at such a tender age. After all, she was only a child. One evening, as they sat together before the fireplace in the big living room, part of Olympia's persistent campaign to "make them intimate," Helen said:

"Auntie, have you inquired about a school for Limpy? The second semester should begin very soon now, I think."

"Yes," said Olympia promptly. "I have a list of all the girls' schools in the District and I know just what they're good for. All Limpy has to do is to decide whether she wants to educate herself up to society, to the night clubs, to get married, or go into business."

The Senator took off his glasses, wiped them thoroughly and coughed deprecatingly.

"My dear, do you think it's wise starting the child into school in the middle of the year, and such a very hard year? In my opinion, she needs a rest and a change and a little vacation. She looks thin and pale to me!"

The girls and Olympia turned shocked eyes to inspect the astonished Limpy, whose face turned a deep rose from delighted excitement at thought of escaping school.

"Limpy, don't you feel well? You do look feverish!" ejaculated Aunt Olympia, in a panic of alarm.

"Of course she's feverish," said the Senator. "And pale, too, for that matter. Why shouldn't she be pale and feverish? Look at all she's gone through! Too much study doesn't do a young mind any good. I say let her come around with me and see the sights and get a good rest. She can get enough schooling next year."

Aunt Olympia was more than distressed; she was terrified. This was Limpy!

"Limpy, do you feel sick? Have you any pain?" she quavered. And her alarm was for Limpy alone. She never once thought of the danger to her campaign. "Limpy, I don't believe you do look very healthy. We'll have the doctor in, right away. Maybe the Senator is right, girls. Maybe she'd better rest and take things easy this year."

"Of course I'm right," said the Senator, well pleased with himself. "Certainly she'd better rest and have a good time. She can read good books when she feels like it. There's real education in books. She can come up with me and listen to the Senate—though it is not usually very educational."

"I could coach her in trigonometry," said Helen. "She's going to have trouble with that when she goes to college."

"Of course!" said the Senator. "A few minutes a day won't hurt her, but don't run it into the ground."

And then suddenly Limpy came to life. She bounded out of her low chair, crossed the room in two lithe leaps and landed in a heap on the Senator's rigid, unaccustomed knees. She clasped him in both arms, seriously deranging his two-dollar tie and knocking off his glasses.

"Oh, Uncle Lancy, you darling!" she cried. "You perfect old peach! What a simply swell idea! . . . Aunt Olympia, he's right! I swear I'm beginning to think maybe I very nearly do feel sick!"

There was no further trouble about being intimate with Uncle Lancy. Limpy had taken him to their united bosom and he was theirs. But Helen took pains to select good books for her to read for educational purposes and gave her an hour's grilling in trigonometry every day. After all, a child that age should spend some time learning something!

On an afternoon in March, when all official Washington was beginning to fret at the unconscionable delay of adjournment, Aunt Olympia sat quietly, at peace with the world, reading the *Congressional Record*. She read every word of the *Record* these days—not, as usual, merely the portions that dealt with the Senator's bills or committees. She didn't dare miss a word, because already there were sly remarks, innuendos, even open accusations cropping out that had to do with purges, with party loyalty, with campaign expenses. Every such word was important to Aunt Olympia, with the Senator up for re-election.

Adele stood between the deep blue curtains at the window looking down into the hotel park. All outdoor things made her think of home and of old days and of that low mound in the cemetery back in Iowa; made her a little sad. She wore a graceful ankle-length gown of white crepe, with wide loose sleeves banded with soft black fur. Aunt Olympia had picked it out. A narrow band of black velvet confined Adele's fair curls—that was her own idea.

Hilda, the sour Swede, appeared suddenly at the door, prefacing her appearance with a suggestive cough.

"I wish you wouldn't cough," said Aunt Olympia irritably. "You sound like the Senator about to take the edge off something good. If you've got anything to say, take a cough drop and say it."

"Mr. Len Hardesty is downstairs and craves a few minutes," said Hilda.

Aunt Olympia flung the *Record* halfway across the room. She bounded out of her chair. She palpitated all over. Adele, turning between the curtains, regarded her with amazement. Aunt Olympia had never before shown temper, except verbally.

"Len Hardesty! That louse! That snake-in-the-grass! I won't see him! Don't you let him cross my threshold! Tell him I'm not at home."

"Sure you're home, Ollie Slop, old top," drawled a low voice, and Len Hardesty stood in the door. "I was afraid you'd be in one of your little pre-campaign moods, so I told them to announce me in five minutes and I came right on up and tapped at the side door and a very nice young lady at the telephone let me in and motioned me down here, and here I am."

"Oh, hello, Len," said Aunt Olympia, not at all unpleasantly but rather cordially.

"How lovely and serene you are today, with the *Record* at your feet," he went on coolly. "Where's Sloppy?"

"If you mean the Senator, he is where he should be, trying to bring some order out of a chaotic Congress."

Her eyes went unconsciously to the motionless figure in black and white between the blue curtains. Quite naturally Len Hardesty's gaze followed hers.

Swiftly his eyes widened. Inelegantly, his jaw dropped. Wordless for once he gaped at the vision between the curtains. Then he flung his hat to the floor and clutched his head in both hands.

"My little niece, Adele, the Senator's middle ward," announced Olympia, with a smirk of smug complacency.

"Not one of the orphans! Ollie, you wouldn't do that to an old pal! You couldn't be that low—not even you could be as low as that! You wouldn't sick your old buddy onto seven brats and a tin trumpet and then double-cross me with—heaven-on-earth! Would you do that?"

"Oh, that's only one of them," said Aunt Olympia happily. "We have three! They adore the Senator!"

"You couldn't have three! There couldn't be three. There are no miracles, not even in politics. She's not flesh and blood anyhow. She's wax. She's an automaton you've rigged up to throw a scare into me—and successfully, I admit that, most successfully!"

Adele, being stared at, dropped a very slight curtsey and smiled.

"You pulled a wire!" Len Hardesty accused Aunt Olympia. "You know you pulled a wire. She's a female

Charlie McCarthy, that's what she is; but a damn sight better-looking."

"Well, what of it? Charlie seems to be doing all right for himself. And so's Adele, if you ask me! . . . Sit down, darling." The warmth of her smile for Adele was beatific.

"Ollie, I want to make a deal with you," said Len Hardesty earnestly. "I'll swap you the brats, all seven of 'em, and the bellwether too, for this one; just this one. You can keep the others."

"Not interested. Definitely not interested," said Aunt Olympia. "You will admit, then, that when I pick campaign material, I pick it."

"I'll throw in two of Brother Wilkie's best sermons and the tin trumpet. I'll throw in the cane, too."

Aunt Olympia waved the idea from her with a happy gesture.

Len Hardesty took another look at the smiling Adele. "To tell you the truth, Ollie," he said humbly, "I'm not sure but I'll throw in the Governor. . . . Yes, come to think of it, I will! I'll throw in the Governor."

"I wouldn't have him for fish bait," she said contemptuously. "You made your political bed, now lie in it. If you can find room among the brats and the tin horn."

"I'd better have a drink, Ollie. I'd better have two drinks. I feel very badly. Low! Very low. She"—he nodded his head dolorously toward Adele—"wouldn't know what we are talking about, Ollie, but you and I know. Well, I feel very bad in the pit of my stomach."

"Oh, I know about the pit of the stomach," said Adele brightly. "It's where you feel the most all-gone when you feel all-gone."

"I'll probably need three drinks. Ring, Ollie," he said dully.

Aunt Olympia, quivering with pleasure, rang for Hilda.

"Since this snake-in-the-grass is bent on drinking himself to death, we may as well do what we can to help along the good cause. Scotch and soda, Hilda, and a plain lemonade for Miss Adele."

Len Hardesty, still holding his head in both hands, stared uninterruptedly at Adele.

"Can't I do something for you? Can't I be helpful? May I offer you a cigarette?"

"Not now, thanks," said Adele politely.

"What do you mean, 'Not now, thanks'? Don't you smoke?" he asked moodily.

"Oh, Aunt Olympia!" Adele cried reproachfully. "You said no one would ever suspect we don't smoke if we just say, 'Not now, thanks.' "

"So she's teaching you your lines, eh? I might have known it. I suppose it was she who taught you to run your eyelashes up and down like that and give a guy goose flesh."

"No, I must have got that from God. But she told me what to say about drinking."

"What did she tell you to say?" he asked in sepulchral tones. "Whatever it is, it's going to be a vote-getter."

"She said if a gentleman simply insists that you take a drink . . . Now, you pretend you're a gentleman and insist that I have a drink and I'll give you a demonstration. I need practice anyhow."

Len Hardesty took a glass from the tray Hilda had placed on the coffee table, put in liquor and water. He

walked slowly toward her. "I only hope you do not change your mind and accept this at my insistence, for I need it myself. More pit of the stomach business. . . . Oh, my dear Miss Adele, do have a drink! Oh, you must have a drink! Come on, be a sport, just one now! Pick you up no end."

Adele leaned forward, gazed intently, deliriously, into his eyes and then gave the lovely blonde head a very decided, very becoming little shake. "Oh, no," she said purringly. "No indeed, thanks. I wouldn't dare! I'm—having entirely too much stimulant as it is." And the blue eyes clung to his.

Len Hardesty set the glass on a small table with a resounding plunk. He turned to Olympia.

"Ollie, I apologize," he said. "I didn't think you had it in you."

"Oh, I just gave her a rough general outline," said Olympia. "I must admit that she added a good deal of embellishment. Take your drink, Len. You're going to need it. I may as well show you the rest. . . . Hilda, ask the young ladies to come in and squelch this worm."

Len drained the glass. "I'll have another, thanks." He poured for himself, slowly. "When I think that I'm going to spend the next eight months pitting my brats against your beauty—"

"Oh, come now, Len, I'm not as good-looking as all that," said Aunt Olympia.

"Ollie, I didn't even see you. I never expect to see you again. I'm not sure I'll ever see anything but—the automaton there. There seems to be a sort of bright light—an aura, you might say—around that pit we mentioned—"

Hilda coughed faintly in the doorway.

"She thinks she's the Senator," said Olympia in a large whisper.

"Miss Helen is waiting for a long-distance telephone from Iowa—"

"Long distance! From Iowa?" ejaculated Aunt Olympia. "Why, who's there to talk to in Iowa, with Congress in session?"

"It might be something about a school," said Adele, swiftly.

"Or—you don't suppose she could have forgotten to—pay that grocery bill?" said Aunt Olympia. "From what I saw of that delivery boy, he's just the type to buy a new necktie and put on his gloves and follow a bill clear to Washington."

Hilda coughed again. "And Miss Limpy is having a conference."

"Having a conference? Miss Limpy? What are you talking about? Is the Senator home?"

"No, ma'am. It's with a—a policeman. Miss Limpy accidentally or something threw her arithmetic—"

"Trigonometry," corrected Adele, loyally.

"Yes'm. Out the window and hit the policeman on the head, and he's having a conference about it."

"Well, don't let him in here," said Aunt Olympia decidedly. "We've worms enough in here. Miss Limpy can handle him herself. Tell her to come in when he goes."

Len Hardesty shook an accusing finger at Aunt Olympia. "You staged this, Ollie. You staged this whole scene. You knew I was coming. You've been listening at keyholes and pursuing me with detectives and you knew I was

headed here and you staged this. Hitting a policeman on the dome with a trigonometry! So that's the kind of campaign we're up against, eh?"

"No," said Aunt Olympia honestly. "I'm sorry, but I can't hog the credit. It never entered my head. It's good, Len. I admit it's good. But Limpy thought it up herself."

Len groaned.

"But just to cheer you up, Len, I will admit that Adele is far the best-looking. The others are all right—in some ways even better. I don't believe Adele would ever have thought of bashing a policeman with a trigonometry. But she got most of the looks."

"You're telling me that?" he demanded bitterly. "I'm no fool. I know there's a limit on that sort of thing. . . . But if that kid thought of attacking a policeman—out of her own head—she's dangerous. They're all dangerous. You're dangerous."

"Oh, we just try to hold our own," said Aunt Olympia seraphically.

Limpy bobbed brightly in at that point. She looked slight and small in comparison with Adele's tallness and Olympia's general largeness. She began to speak almost before she was visible. But Len Hardesty, a good reporter, did not overlook that even before she spoke, the fleetingest, most trusting of glances flashed between the two girls—question and answer in one. "Oh, Aunt Olympia," began Limpy, "what's a logarithm?"

Aunt Olympia drew herself up and blinked uncertainly.

Adele spoke quickly. "If you find out, darling, I wish you'd tell me. I studied them for a year and got a C plus,

but nobody ever thought to tell me what they really are."

"What in the world are you talking about?" demanded Aunt Olympia.

"Logarithms," said Limpy. "Logarithms. I can spell them but I can't imagine what they are."

"Ask him," said Olympia neatly. "He's a newspaperman. He knows everything. Just ask him what is a logarithm?"

Limpy turned hopefully to Len Hardesty.

"Logarithm!" he said resentfully. "What do you mean, logarithm? That was no logarithm! That was a plain American policeman you bashed on the dome."

"Yes, how about that policeman, Limpy?" asked Aunt Olympia, suddenly remembering the issue.

"Oh, that! That was the merest accident. . . . Unless," Limpy frowned, and pursed up her lips, "unless, there was something sinister beneath it! I confess, I was a little suspicious, for why should he be prowling about under Uncle Lancy's windows in election year? I asked if he was a special policeman or anything—I didn't want to come right out and ask if he had been hired by the Opposition. But he said no, he was just regular.—It was too bad, wasn't it?"

"How did it happen, Limpy?" asked Adele helpfully, now that the first explosive moment had been safely bridged.

"Oh, I was a bit confused about those logarithms—I don't care for them at all, Auntie, and if you don't mind I'd really rather study something else, like French drama or modern novels. I looked out at the trees—and all of a sudden it came to me in a sort of flash that there was a

kind of a connection there—sort of a relativity—trees and logarithms—or logs, for short. They seemed to go together. And first thing I knew the book was flying right out the window among the trees and I do think it was very suspicious that a policeman should be lurking down there. They went together—trees, and logs-for-short—but the policeman just doesn't fit in."

"Unless he was a blockhead to begin with," said Adele.

"And perhaps he had a chip on his shoulder," added Len Hardesty.

"Well, he seemed to have when he first came in. But he went away very good-naturedly. I gave him five dollars—out of your pocketbook, Adele; I'm low this week. And he left his regards for the Senator. I didn't do it as a bribe, of course, but I didn't want to—embarrass dear Uncle Lancy in election year."

"Uncle Lancy!" said Len Hardesty bitterly. "So that's the game, eh? Uncle Lancy! Who thought that up? Why not Uncle Sloppy? Why not Uncle Del? Oh, no, it had to be Uncle Lancy! That's for the Irish vote, Olympia Slop, and you can't deny it! We're eaten up alive with the Irish in our state. But you don't get away with it, Ollie! Not with me handling the Opposition. I'll tear your family tree limb from limb. I'll hack it to its deepest roots. Alençon Delaporte Slopshire! French to the core. Who ever heard of an Irish Alençon? Who ever heard of an Irish Delaporte?"

"And who ever heard of a French Shire? All the shires are British. Devonshire, Lancastershire, Leicestershire—"

"English!" he interposed rudely. "The shires are English and aristocratic English, too!"

"How about Worcestershire?" asked Limpy helpfully. "Is that Irish?"

"The only Irish thing in your name is Slop," said Len Hardesty grimly. "And I daresay the French have some of it, too. . . . Uncle Lancy! It's not only French, it's aristocratic and I can prove it. . . . I never suspected we were in for this kind of a campaign!"

"It's the Senator," interrupted Hilda moodily.

Olympia headed for the hall telephone on a nervous trot. That dour "It's the Senator" always took her on the run, in a tremor for some pet bill. Limpy occupied herself cheerfully with the cakes and nuts on the tray.

Len Hardesty got up suddenly and went over and stood beside Adele, now seated in a big chair with the blue curtains for flattering background. She looked up with a slight smile and took a sip of her lemonade. She looked up again. This time, the smile melted away on her lips and suddenly they were looking into each other's eyes, deeply, very soberly. Len shook his head with sudden impatience. Something must be said.

"Do you like Washington?" he asked gravely, though the trite query struck him as a good deal of an anticlimax, after meeting her eyes.

"I do today," she said.

"Does the old girl give you all your lines?" he asked moodily.

"Not that one. That was original."

"That's something. . . . Did you mean it?"

"Yes," she said, with honest brevity.

"Well, it's a good thing. To tell the truth, you're going to be seeing a good deal of me from this on—"

"Oh, no, we're not," interrupted Olympia, bounding back. "The only way we're going to be seeing anything of you is at the other end of a good sharp stiletto. If there's any tampering with my campaign material I'll report it to some committee on something."

"I can't stay for dinner tonight," he said, "though it's nice of you to ask me. I have another engagement. I can come back about nine though, since you insist, and—talk things over with Sloppy and sort of check up on the campaign. And how about my dropping in for luncheon around one-thirty tomorrow? I can take the whole afternoon off—if I don't get caught—and give the girls a good sales talk."

"We're going to be out! We're going to be out from right now till after the election," said Aunt Olympia rudely.

"See you tonight about nine. Thanks, Ollie. Sweet of you to ask me. . . . Uncle Lancy! My word!"

"We're virtually out now," said Aunt Olympia.

"What do you think, Limpy?" said Adele suddenly. "Are they arriving at an armistice, or is this a lull before they tear each other limb from limb?"

"I'm expecting blows at any minute," said Limpy. "That's what I'm waiting for. Otherwise I'd be right back with my logarithms."

"Blows! Blows between Ollie and me?" He sat on the arm of her chair and put his arm around her. "Why, Ollie and I are mad about each other. It's my one regret that Sloppy saw her first. Why, I'd lie down in the dirt and let her walk right over me—though I'd be a good deal flattened in the process. And she'd do the same for me, too!"

"Sure I would," said Aunt Olympia, with a beaming

smile. She patted his hand affectionately. "You snake-in-the-grass!"

"Now, there's one thing I want to warn you about," Len said, squeezing Olympia's shoulder and looking at Adele. "Your Aunt Ollie is a perfect babe in the woods when it comes to men. She thinks any consistently-voting Democrat can be trusted. But we newspapermen know that hardly anybody, except ourselves, is to be trusted with a pretty woman. Out of the depths of bitter experience, I warn you. Don't go out with any congressmen. Don't sit next to them at table if you can avoid it. . . . I'd better bring you some mudguards! What size mudguard do you wear? . . . Don't come in contact with foreign diplomats. Stay away from embassies. Shun college boys. In short, the safest thing for you to do is to sit right there in front of that very becoming curtain and let me bring you the news. . . . As for you," he turned suddenly to Limpy, "it was a good act, smart as the dickens. But you should have started on a lower scale and worked up to a climax. It's going to be mighty hard to work up from bashing a policeman. You should have saved that for the night before election. It was good, it was darned good. But poor timing. I'll give you pointers. . . . Well, good-by, Ollie. Think over my proposition about swapping material! I'll throw in two purges and a blessing!"

Chapter IV

Never in her life had Aunt Olympia experienced such satisfying happiness. The girls, with their gentle youth, made a perfect foil for her rugged ruddiness, her biting humor. Their appreciative laughter spurred her to gusty heights never before attained. She had not realized how large a part the audience plays in the success of theatrical endeavor. She could hardly let them out of her sight long enough to get their proper sleep and begrudged Limpy every minute spent on "those lousy logarithms."

So the girls were a little disconcerted one day when she went about the apartment wrapped in a brooding air of detachment, full lips compressed, left eyelid ominously lowered; seeming not to hear their light talk, and, still more surprisingly, adding no enlivening embellishments of her own. They watched her uneasily.

"Are you sick, Aunt Olympia?" Helen finally asked.

"No," she said abruptly. "I'm working my subconscious."

The girls smiled faintly.

"Don't overtax it," said Adele. "I understand it's rather delicate."

"And be careful it doesn't turn and begin working you," added Limpy.

Aunt Olympia did not hear them.

That night she addressed the Senator mildly.

"Del, I want to ask your advice."

The Senator coughed deprecatingly and his glance at the girls was apologetic.

"What do you think we ought to do about these girls?" she demanded.

That shocked the Senator into immediate coherence. "Do about them!" he ejaculated. "Do nothing about them! Leave them alone! They're doing all right for themselves."

"Referring to their social life," Olympia continued. "Should we bring them out or keep them in seclusion?"

The Senator wiped his glasses. Then he smiled. "My dear, living up to my established reputation as a philanthropic and public-spirited American, I say, bring them out. Give the world a treat! The world needs a treat and I am not one who believes that the blessed should be niggardly with their treasures."

Olympia frowned. "Thinking of the campaign," she said significantly. "Which would have more telling effect on the campaign; to let them go out, decorously of course, most decorously, or keep them in modest retirement until we go home? If I know our constituents, and I think I do, it would flatter them no end to get the idea that while we were obliged to safeguard and shelter these children from the insidious snares of Washington, we realize that in our home—among our friends—our constituents—they are safe."

The Senator considered this, frowningly. He had not yet worked up any campaign spirit himself, with Congress in no mood for adjournment. His troubled eyes circled the attentive subject of the discussion and the sight led him to instant conclusion.

"No use to punish the girls for the sake of a few votes, in my opinion. Let them do as they please."

Olympia never paid any attention to what he said. "We could go right ahead—building them up—whetting public interest—putting out just the right photos—and still hold them aloof. It would delight the voters; and why not? It is a definite compliment. But I don't want to bore the girls."

"Aunt Olympia," Helen broke in gently, "if you don't mind, I'd really like to go around as much as I can. I do not mean to gay, social things. I do not want to seem disrespectful or lacking in feeling, but since I shall be with you only this one season, I feel I ought to learn as much as I can, get as much experience as possible. I'd like to learn how things run, how Congress works, all the things that go to make Washington the heart of the nation."

Aunt Olympia agreed with her heartily. She invariably agreed with the girls, even if she flatly flouted her agreement in the next breath. She was determined to be on good terms with them at all cost and she felt that an initial agreement took the edge off what followed.

"Perfectly right, my dear, perfectly sound. So you should. Washington is an education, a higher—and, in some ways, a lower—education. It is your civic duty to learn all you can. The life here will be valuable experience for you in the future whether you teach school—or go into politics—or merely sell—say, groceries."

A swift glance flickered among the girls.

"I don't see that politics enters into selling groceries," said Uncle Lancy. "Unless you refer to putting the bad fruit at the bottom of the basket."

Aunt Olympia gave him a straight, hard look. Already the girls knew that look. They called it her shut-upping look. "Aunt Olympia gave me her shut-upping look, and I never opened my mouth," they would say to one another. Uncle Lancy had no name for it but he understood it.

"A thorough education," he remarked safely, dropping groceries. "You can come about with me, Helen. You can sit in my committee meetings. Some of them are merely good antidotes for insomnia, but, on the other hand, some of them are very interesting. The munitions committee got into a fight every time it met. You'd have enjoyed that, but unfortunately it wound up its work and quit."

"After all," went on Aunt Olympia musingly, "it does impress homey hicks to know that one has been received in Washington. But we'll be careful. We'll discriminate."

"Sure, that's the idea," corroborated the Senator. "Discriminate. Take them only to things that are good fun—and hold them in seclusion from the bores."

"I'll start off with a luncheon, exclusive, very small. Then a large tea—not too large. . . . It's too bad about Len Hardesty; he's a lot of help at that sort of thing. . . . Yes, Helen, you're right. We'll bring you and Adele out—in a decorous way—and seclude Limpy."

"Aw, Uncle Lancy!" wailed Limpy.

The Senator rose to her appeal. "Stuff and nonsense," he said. "What's the matter with Limpy? Limpy can take care of herself. Let her have a good time."

"Del, you silly dunce, that child—"

"Seventeen, Auntie darling!" Limpy reminded her. "And seventeen is very, very close to eighteen."

"Sixteen," corrected Adele determinedly.

"Plus. Large plus, small minus."

"Let 'em have as much fun as they can, that's my idea," said Uncle Lancy loyally.

"I don't want to have fun," disclaimed Helen promptly. "I just want to learn as much as I can; about politics and government, particularly; from the ground up. I don't want gay society—"

"You want official things," said Aunt Olympia. "Yes, you're right. There's nothing gay about them. Well, we have a stack of invitations. We'll go through them tomorrow and you can pick out what you like. And I'll plan the luncheon." She frowned thoughtfully for a while, left eye invisible. "You know, Del," she said suddenly, "I'm not at all sure but Adele could do a damn sight worse."

The Senator did not pause to cough. "Do worse!" he ejaculated. "I should say she could do worse. I don't see how she could very well do any better myself. She's just about perfect, in my opinion. They all are. In fact, they are perfect."

Adele laughed. "It has a faint resemblance to a compliment, Auntie," she said. "But it's a bit too foggy for my clouded intelligence. Do worse than what?"

"Than Len Hardesty. He's smart. He's got what an election takes. And the Senator'll be up again in '44."

The Senator coughed deprecatingly. "She's joking, my dear. This is pre-election stuff. Before election day, she'll be telling me, with forceful, if inelegant, expletives, that if I ever run for anything again she'll divorce, and probably de-neck, me. This is before-the-campaign stuff."

"My very words," said Aunt Olympia complacently.

"I forgot my quotes," admitted Uncle Lancy.

"What a cocky little fool I was, Brick," Helen wrote home to Iowa, *"to think I could learn this racket in one year. Aunt Olympia's been in it right from the cradle—or at least from the marriage altar—and she says it's still so much haywire to her. It seems to be mostly luck and 'getting the breaks,' and of course, seizing Opportunity before the Opposition gets hold of it. Aunt Olympia says if she didn't watch every breath the Senator draws, he'd get himself impeached before breakfast. But I am learning a little, I think.*

"There's one thing I've learned, and this is important. We've got to get over that provincial feeling that political opponents are social lepers, to be snubbed and ostracised and passed by on the other side. Aunt Olympia says it is a sign of superiority to hobnob with the Opposition—except at the polls, of course. She says it is only little fry who carry political animosities further than the Congressional Record. *And I must say, she lives up to her philosophy. I've met quite a number of Republican wives and they are very nice to me and ask me to their meetings and teas, and Aunt Olympia encourages me to go. Sometimes she goes with me.*

"Really, Brick, they are amazing, Uncle Lancy and she. Take Len Hardesty for instance. He is here half the time, mooning over Adele mostly, but always showing up at the dinner table and the cocktail tray. He even calls up and tells her what to have or not to have. 'No sea food, on your life,' he said last night. 'I've had two lobsters, three shrimps à la creole, one fish-fry and four sea-food platters this week and I'm just about fished up.' It was Friday, too, but Aunt Olympia canceled the fish order and got steak.

"And last week who should breeze in unexpectedly but Brother Wilkie, the Governor, running against Uncle Lancy. He 'phoned and Auntie asked him to dinner and he came. They were lovely to him and Aunt Olympia asked him to ask the blessing—winking at Limpy down the table—so we could hardly keep from laughing. Len Hardesty bobbed in at the last moment and that was very amusing. He didn't know the Governor was in town and Len himself was supposed to be working like a dog up home. They were all quite gay about it. The Governor teased him a lot. He said to Uncle Lancy:

" 'Remember the campaign two years ago, when he had such a crush on that pretty manicurist and had to have his nails done four times a week?'

"Len stretched his hands across the table to Adele and said, 'You can tear every nail of them out by the roots, if you want to.' Adele is getting—not bláse, Brick—but rather—well, sophisticated, in a nice way. She examined his fingers critically and said, 'Well, I'm no manicurist, Len, but definitely I should say a little soap and water wouldn't do them any harm.'

"She wouldn't have done that six months ago. She would have blushed and dropped his hand like a fishing worm. . . . You see, we are learning a little."

Aunt Olympia was far deeper in the campaign than either the girls or the Senator realized. She spent two hours every morning carefully conning the important dailies from home and making notes of things to be attended to; cards of congratulation from herself and the Senator to everyone having babies or getting married;

condolences for illness and death; approval of the activities of clubs and church organizations, with pertinent suggestions and offering co-operation; and she painstakingly, with well-concealed bitterness, received every constituent who happened to be in Washington and telephoned or called.

"That woman!" she boomed acridly, as one caller departed, carrying an autographed photograph of the Senator and a neat box of teacakes for "the little cherubs at home." "She's been trying to horn in here for six years! Came on purpose, of course, because it's election year and all termites are admitted."

By the first of April Olympia had completed plans for the campaign entourage; deciding on a motor trailer to insure the domesticity of the family, with beds, kitchen and cozy dinette.

"We won't have to eat there much," she assured the girls kindly. "Just enough to get good photos of how domestic and homey we are, with you girls tripping prettily around at your work. We'll have Hilda send us a crate of cooked food every day."

"Doesn't she campaign with us?"

"Oh, no! Except in the Scandinavian districts, where she sits at the table with us. . . . Not in the rest of the state. The average voter thinks if a senator can afford a maid he's getting too much money."

There would be a sound truck for the Senator's speeches and in addition to their own big car, a couple of secondhand Fords for the staff, visiting reporters, *et al.* She fretted a good deal over the sound truck, having ideas of her own on that important matter. It must have microphones both

inside and on the driver's seat: on the driver's seat to show the Senator off in good weather, and inside "for rain; the Senator catches cold if he gets wet." It must be equipped with cabinets, shelves and drawers to carry necessary papers and books of reference, including a dictionary and a Bible, and must provide space for one or preferably two cots, to constitute sleeping quarters for the chauffeurs.

After consulting and personally inspecting every make of trailer and sound truck on the market, she decided to buy—from some home dealer, of course—old, run-down, antiquated cars that could be rebuilt.

"The shabbier the better—on the outside," she explained to the girls. "To take some of the gravel off that damn 'Alençon' . . . New cars look royalistic. . . . But don't worry. We'll have the best and most modern engines installed under the rusty hoods; like Uncle Joe Cannon, with silk underwear under his homey homespun. We'll have them rebuilt from the tires up—on the inside. Fortunately, the works don't show."

"Evidently experience is like butter and doesn't suit the works," said Limpy.

"Not even the best experience really suits an auto's works," added Adele.

Aunt Olympia knew her *Congressional Record* better than her *Alice in Wonderland.* She went straight back to the campaign.

She sent up to Maysville, her home town and the state capital, for a motor dealer and had him come to Washington—at the Senator's expense—to get her ideas. She had drawn rough drafts of what she desired, both in trailer and trunk, but the expert did not comprehend them readily.

"Why, it's as simple as a—a logarithm," she said irritably. "For the sound truck we want a secondhand, rundown delivery wagon, an enclosed one, of course. Put in the best works you can get hold of. Get a good sound man to wire it, with mikes on the driver's seat as well as inside. Build cabinets of shelves and drawers along the inside to put papers and books in. And leave room for a good easy chair for the Senator, because his feet swell before the end of the campaign. Isn't that simple enough?"

"It would be cheaper to buy a secondhand station wagon," the expert said helpfully. "I can get you a first-class station wagon for—"

"I don't want a station wagon," roared Aunt Olympia. "I've got a station wagon and I'm not going to use it. . . . Station wagons are royalistic," she confided to the listening girls.

"How you going to ventilate this delivery wagon? They've got no ventilation."

"Oh! That's so." Then Olympia brightened. "Now, I tell you what to do. You put little long narrow windows all around the truck clear up at the top. That way, the Senator can get ventilation from above without sitting in a draft. He gets pretty hot over some of his campaign speeches and I don't want him coming down with pneumonia."

"It'll cost like the dickens," he reminded her.

"For the good of his country, the Senator will bear the expense," she said with dignity.

"What color you want this painted?"

"I don't want it painted," she said exasperatedly. "No paint! I want rust and mud and scratches and dents, but

no paint. If it's painted when you get it, you set fire to it or soak it in acid. Is that clear?"

The month of April she devoted pretty largely to planning the girls' campaign wardrobes. On these, she spared neither time, talent nor expense. She had the best dressmakers and designers in Washington at work. There were graceful, girlish dresses for afternoon and for dinner; there were sport clothes, bathing suits, riding costumes; there were fetching little costumes of finest gingham for their dainty housework about the trailer. Aunt Olympia persistently referred to these as their "cottons."

"Why cotton, Auntie?" demanded Limpy. "We don't raise cotton up there, do we?"

"No, darling," said Aunt Olympia, beaming approval for her acumen. "We don't raise cotton, but we have nineteen large cotton mills and they employ at least ten thousand constituents."

Although all their dresses were what Aunt Olympia called "vote-getters" to the last ribbon and the smallest button, she reserved her most passionate interest for what she called their "wind-up ensembles."

"Wind-up ensembles!" gasped Limpy. "Do we do it in public, Auntie? If you mean wind ourselves up and unwrap in public like a strip tease—well, really, I think fans are more modest."

Aunt Olympia's ready laughter boomed out. "Wind up the campaign," she explained succinctly. "The Senator winds up with a huge rally. That's the big night. You catch a lot of voters—floaters, they are—if you handle the wind-up right. Your wind-up costumes are to be *chef d'œuvres;* absolutely *chef d'œuvres.*"

"It can't be the same as *hors d'œuvres,*" Limpy assured her sisters. "Not even Aunt Olympia would expect them to eat us."

"I wouldn't trust Len Hardesty," said Aunt Olympia. "Not if Adele looks as well as I expect. . . . Let me see, that will be the first week of November. Fall dresses. Felt hats. Wide, sweeping black for Helen with little white doodads. Droopy white for Limpy with long black streamers."

"I suppose I'm to go bareheaded," said Adele.

"No, no, darling! Not quite. Teeny black and white something or other, with a bit of a veil and my only regret is that Len Hardesty won't be there to see it. He'd strangle the brats with his bare hands."

She sent for the Capitol physician.

"Doctor, I hate to bother you—knowing how busy you are keeping your doddering charges on their feet—or at least upright in their chairs. But—such an emergency!"

"It's a pleasure, I assure you," he said politely. "Nobody sick, I hope."

"No! And nobody's going to be if I can help it! You see, Doctor, maybe you've heard—we have our three little nieces with us this summer. And it's election year—I'm sure you've heard that!—and the Senator is up. So he's got to campaign and we can't leave those children at home alone so there's nothing for it but to drag them along with us. Of course, I'll do my best, but I want to be prepared for any emergency. I want you to order me a complete set of campaign emergency first-aid equipment—to take care of everything from a fever blister to a snake bite. Naturally I want them to look their best."

The surprised doctor began immediately trying to think of what would be required in a campaign emergency.

"I know what's needed!" said Olympia grimly. "It's a big overdose of sleeping tablets to carry you through the speeches straight to the polls. But that isn't what I have in mind. We'll be roughing it in a rattletrap old trailer and—anything may happen; poison ivy—most appropriate to a campaign, I must say—and scratches from blackberry bushes. . . . Oh, no the blackberries will be gone then; well, there'll be bruises and headaches—plenty of headaches—and sore throats and shock and overeating—don't forget the Senator's weak stomach—and a lotion for sore feet—don't forget his feet—and the best of everything, Doctor! The best of everything!"

Helen did not follow the preliminary campaign activities as closely as her sisters. Studying the political racket kept her fairly busy. She read the *Congressional Record* conscientiously, if boredly. She spent hours visiting the Senator's committees and trying to make heads and tails of things which didn't make sense to an average intelligence like hers. She hung over the gallery of the House as if she had become a fixture there.

"It rather hurts Uncle Lancy's feelings," she wrote Brick, *"because I spend so much time in the House when I could be gazing at him in the Senate, and I can't explain that I am taking notes on things for you. It's really embarrassing when we go to the Senate. Uncle Lancy beams all over and wipes his glasses and tiptoes around pointing us out to his friends and they look up and bow and people stare at us.*

"But I must say, Brick, that on the whole I think our

Republicans look a lot more—well, more upstanding—and wear their clothes better than most of the Democrats. Aunt Olympia says that's because they have more stomach. 'It takes a lot of stomach to do justice to a good tailor,' she says. 'Republicans are noted for their stomach. So they should be! They've had to stomach plenty these last few years.'

"Really, Brick, I hate to say it, but some of the congressmen look quite common. Almost vulgar. The way they sprawl around in their seats and chew things and mess up their hair! If they could hear the remarks passed about them in the galleries they would sit up and try to look like gentlemen, at least. Visitors to the Senate galleries always run through the chart to find their senators, or ask the guides to point them out, and they look at them so eagerly and are so embarrassed when they look messy. They try to apologize to their friends and say that usually he is quite dressy; he must be tired out, perhaps up all night working at something.

"Everyone from Iowa is very nice to me, though nearly all Democrats, of course. And no one seems to realize there may be an upset out there in the fall election. The Gillettes are sweet to me; they say, after all, the state comes before the party. Our neighbors from South Dakota are a great comfort to me. Case (R. So. Dak.) as the papers refer to him. This is his first term in Congress, and since we are very friendly, Mrs. Case has been giving me a lot of pointers.

"She said the first large tea she went to, she was shocked to see that all the eastern wives kept their gloves on and the western wives took theirs off. So, not to let the East get

ahead of us, the next time, she kept hers on. But that time everybody, East and West, removed them. So she decided hereafter to do as she pleases; if her hands are hot, or the food is sticky, she'll take them off; and if she has broken a finger nail and hasn't had time for a manicure, she'll keep them on.

"She said her worst trouble the first year was distinguishing between the wives. She said every one she met she was determined to remember, and the next one she met was so like her she couldn't tell them apart. She says the disconcerting thing is that all congressmen's wives look alike; they wear the same type of slick black dress, the same small black hats with little veils, and say the very same things. She thinks they even use the same make-up.

"I told her about you and she thinks it's lovely. She says if you need help, just call on them.

"I remarked one night to Aunt Olympia that it seemed strange that so many of the active church people—at least in the north—seem to be Republicans, and she said, 'It's not a bit strange! Religious people are brought up on the idea that the only way to be sure of going to Heaven when they die is to be charitable and philanthropic to the poor and oppressed. And if we Democrats succeed in our plan to give justice to all, there will be no poor and oppressed for them to be charitable to, and then how will they ever get to Heaven?' We thought that was very funny but Uncle Lancy said she was only joking.

"Doesn't it seem strange, Brick, that though we are here, right in the heart of the nation, everything that happens is so trivial and unimportant? Almost like church affairs at home. Little things happen, of course, but they

are only little things. It is disappointing. Aunt Olympia says I'd be surprised if I realized the bigness that underlies the surface of these little things. She says it's like an iceberg, with only one-ninth of it showing. But I think really important things should look and sound important; and nothing does."

Aunt Olympia at last reached a stage of her preparations where she felt impelled to ask the Senator's advice.

"Del, how about a publicity man for our campaign?"

"Why, we're going to have Dave Cooper. He's the best we can get, since Len's tied up. I've already spoken to him about it. He's working on it now."

"Yes, of course, for you," she said significantly. "But how about the girls here?"

The Senator wisely said nothing, but the girls rose to it.

"For us!"

"We've had enough publicity to last us a lifetime!"

"Heavens, Auntie, do we rate a publicity man?"

"Oh, he'll only be an assistant to Dave Cooper, but we'll need someone to handle our end of it. Dave'll be pretty busy. . . . We need someone more sentimental. For sob stuff. Heart interest. Human appeal. Let me see—um—ah! Del—what would you think of—well, what would you think of—say—someone like—Cecil Dodd?"

The Senator came to with a snap. "Cecil Dodd! . . . Cecil Dodd, my dear!" The Senator put on an extra pair of glasses to regard her more severely. "Why, Ollie, Cecil Dodd doesn't know the first thing about politics! He'd never get to first base. In fact, he'd never even get to bat. He's never been in a campaign in his life. Cecil Dodd—

well, Cecil Dodd is what I call a sofa-sitter. But I've heard it expressed more forcibly and perhaps with more truth."

"Oh, he's not so dumb," Olympia rose to the argument. "He's chock-full of human appeal; full of adjectives; why, he knows adjectives I've never even heard of! He's the loudest exponent of youth and beauty in Washington. Do you remember those articles he wrote when Sissy Graves was killed in an airplane accident? A dozen people were killed—and some of them important—but he wrote about Sissy with so much heart appeal that everybody forgot all about the rest of them and made it her exclusive fatality. I know it brought tears to my eyes."

"I don't go in for tears in a campaign," he said, more on the defensive than the girls had ever seen him. "There isn't going to be anything milksop about this campaign. It's going to be muddy."

"He's a fine dancer; he rides horseback and plays tennis and golf and has taken prizes for swimming and diving. Del, try to forget your personal, political aspirations for once in your life, and think of these poor dear children! Don't you want them to have any amusement? Do you expect them to listen to you make speeches and shake hands for six months with no exercise, no fresh air and no—no young companionship?"

This put a different light on the matter. The Senator took off both pairs of glasses and set to wiping one. "That's so," he assented. "I didn't mean to be selfish, my dear. The children come first, of course. . . . But I don't suppose we can get him. I don't think he could tear himself away from the sofas long enough."

"We can get him," said Olympia. "I've already spoken

to him—just tentatively, you understand; asking why he didn't get into the political end of it and he said he wanted to but never got the breaks. We can get him." A happy smile rosied her face. "Wait till Len Hardesty hears this!"

Len Hardesty was not long hearing it. He dropped in on them the next night.

"Had to fly down," he said cheerfully. "Got to fly back, too. The Governor's going tightwad on me; church cropping out in him, I suppose. He asks me every day now whether I'm working the state or the District of Columbia. Funny thing about preachers. They only work Sundays themselves but see no reason why other people shouldn't work—especially for them—day in, day out, week after week, month upon month, here a little and there a little."

"I'm glad you came, Len," said Olympia heartily, almost fondly. "I want to ask your advice about something."

A guarded expression settled over his face. "Oh, you do eh? Then you're up to something I'm against." He braced himself to receive it. "All right. Let's have it. It's dead wrong and you know it."

Olympia laughed happily. "Oh, it's really nothing or I shouldn't be asking your advice. It's a mere detail. It's about a publicity man for the campaign. You know those publicity gangsters better than we do."

Len, who had thought he was prepared for anything, was genuinely surprised.

"Publicity man! Why, you dumb cluck, aren't you having Dave Cooper? If you're not, you'd better get him and get him quick. He's tops."

"Don't be silly, Len. Of course we're having him. . . . For the Senator. . . . But we've got to have an assistant. You see, there's going to be quite a cavalcade of us—what with the trailer and the tent and the sound truck and three cars. We don't want anybody to work day and night for us. We're not like some candidates, who expect a poor publicity man to live, move and have his being with seven brats and a trumpeting beldame."

"I smell a rat," said Len Hardesty. "You never gave me an assistant."

"But we're a much larger party this year, you silly dunce. . . . No, definitely, I am for you laboring classes and I will not have poor old Dave imposed on and worked to death, not even for the Senator. But we'll expect his assistant chiefly to handle our end of it, mine and the girls', when the Senator and Dave are off on their flying junkets and we're cooped up in the trailer. We'll need someone rather young and fairly presentable, don't you think? So he can be a sort of companion to the girls when they're dancing and riding and swimming? And you know yourself, Len, that fairly presentable publicity men are damn hard to get. I don't know that I've ever seen one."

"I'm sorry I spent the money to fly down," he said grimly. "If I'm to pick out a man for you, seems to me you ought to pay the bill out of your expense account."

"Unfortunately we haven't a percentage club, like the Governor," she disclaimed quickly. "Besides, darling, I don't expect you to pick him out."

"That's what I was afraid of," he admitted gloomily. "Now let's get this straight, Ollie. You speak of your cavalcade of cars. What's it to be? A campaign for re-

election, or a specially conducted young ladies' tour with a presentable escort?"

"The election comes first, of course. But after all, the Senator—Uncle Lancy—and I cannot overlook our responsibility to these poor dear children. We must provide for them as best we can, even in the exigencies of a campaign. Who would you suggest?"

"I wouldn't suggest anybody. I'd suggest putting the girls in jail till I get rid of the Governor. They don't need an escort. Dave Cooper can handle them. True, he's no Don Juan! He's forty and fat and married and chews tobacco. But he can give you all the publicity you need and more than you merit."

"I was thinking of someone like—well, how about Cecil Dodd?"

"Cecil Dodd! Lord, Ollie, if you upholster your trailer in purple duvetyn and silken cushions you'll elect the Governor! . . . Cecil Dodd! . . . Ollie, we've had our occasional differences but I've always admired you as a straight shooting, shoulder-to-shoulder old trooper. . . . Cecil Dodd! . . . Do you want to shatter a young man's fondest illusions? . . . Cecil Dodd! You're not taking him to play politics. You're taking him to gum up my works."

"He writes very beautiful and touching articles, Len Hardesty, and you can't deny it. . . . But I admit I want him especially as a sort of a companion—a sort of chaperon for the girls. . . . When they do their playing. . . . I can't keep my mind on them every minute and run this campaign at the same time."

"No! So you salve your calloused conscience by giving them this—this silk pajamaed pariah as a watchdog. . . .

Well, if that's what you're up to, you count Adele out. She can't go. I put my foot down on that. You can sick him onto your innocent Helen and trusting little Limpy if you like—if that's your idea of Christian duty to young orphans—but I've got King's X on Adele and she can't go."

"Well, I'm glad you approve," said Olympia beamingly. "Have a drink, Len? Your seal of approval relieves me a lot. I wasn't quite sure about it in my own mind, but you've settled my doubts."

"Aw, Ollie, be a sport! Give a fellow a break, won't you? Remember what pals we've always been! Remember the life I'm going to lead with the brats and the trumpet yawping at me from every angle! How can I drum up votes for the sawdust trailer if I'm going to be upset over the Opposition all summer? Do you want to nip the budding career of a rising young genius?"

"I'd love to. If you consider yourself a budding genius, which most people don't. Thanks, Len. I'll call him first thing in the morning."

"You'll call him? . . . Haven't you called him! Haven't you cinched it? . . . Thanks for that, my darling old dragon!" he said, a ray of light breaking over his face. "I'll land him first. I know every sofa he sits on. . . . Tough luck, old dear; the Governor's hiring an escort for the brats if he has to add an extra per cent to pay for him. Good-by, dear beautiful angel," he said to Adele. "For your sake, I tear myself away to corral that menace."

The girls sat quite motionless until he had dashed from the room. Aunt Olympia contentedly lighted a cigarette.

"Are—you going to let him get away with it?" gasped Adele.

"My dear," said Aunt Olympia, "in politics you never allow grass to grow where the Opposition is going to plant his foot. I tried to get Cecil this morning but he is up in New York writing up that model murder case for the tabloids. If Len Hardesty knows every sofa in Manhattan, he's had entirely too much experience to associate with you—my dears."

Chapter V

On the next morning at eleven o'clock, Aunt Olympia received Cecil Dodd in the sitting room. She received him alone, having with difficulty hardened her heart to the girls' importunities, for they, eager curiosity doubly whetted by the united opposition of Uncle Lancy and Len Hardesty and by Aunt Olympia's defense, were eager for a glimpse of him. Aunt Olympia, for the only time, withstood their pleas. Even Limpy's "Aw, Aunt Olympia" did not move her.

For all her remarks to the Senator and to Len Hardesty, Aunt Olympia was determined that the young man himself should entertain no false notions of his status. She would make his place clear to begin with and see that he kept it. She greeted him cordially but with official and businesslike briskness.

"I've been thinking of our talk the other day," she began at once. "Did I understand you to say you would like to try your hand at campaigning?"

"I'm crazy to," he said boyishly. "I've applied for a job every place under the sun, but nobody will take me because I have no experience; and how the deuce can I get experience when nobody will try me out? . . . Maybe you could give me a recommendation," he suggested humbly.

"No, I can't do that," she said flatly. "I don't know whether you're any good or not and I'm careful about my

recommendations. But maybe I could give you a job—a very small job, of course. But it would be a starter."

Cecil Dodd was so surprised he couldn't say a word. Refuse a recommendation—and give him a job! It seemed almost unethical.

"You know the Senator is coming up this year," she explained volubly. "Dave Cooper is his man but it's going to be a big job and a stiff job, and we're taking on an assistant. How would you like to try your hand at it?"

"Oh, Mrs. Slopshire!" he gasped reverently.

"It won't be much of a salary," she warned him. "The Senator was such a fool he never dreamed of starting a per cent club himself. Besides," she added hastily, "he thinks it isn't moral."

"Experience is worth more than money," he murmured, devoutly.

"Not to us," she admitted. "Anyhow it'll be something and we'll pay your expenses, and if anybody can teach you the racket, Dave Cooper can. . . . With some help from me. . . . You see, Cece, this isn't like the usual campaign. We've got our young nieces with us and we're going to take them along. Those girls are going to be our best asset in this campaign and we want someone—not quite so hard-boiled as Dave—to do full justice to their vote appeal. And since the girls will be around constantly, we'd like someone of agreeable disposition and—some social experience—to be a sort of companion to them. And we think you'll do all right. You'll take orders from Dave, of course, and do what he tells you and go where you're sent. But your main job will be handling our end of the game."

Cecil Dodd was boyishly delighted. When the first mo-

ment of reverent and worshipful awe had passed he found voice again.

"Mrs. Slopshire," he said earnestly, "I'll work like a dog; I'll work day and night. I'll take orders from anybody."

"Well, don't get mixed up and take them from the Opposition. . . . And it won't be all work. I want the girls to get a lot of fresh air and exercise—swimming and riding and dancing—and you'll probably have to act as escort when the Senator's busy and I'm tired."

"It'll be a pleasure to do anything," he assured her. "Why, Mrs. Slopshire, if we can elect the Senator over that Church crowd and Len Hardesty, it'll be a big feather in my cap. A bigger one in Dave Cooper's, of course, but I will be satisfied with anything. I'll bet I can work up from this to the presidential train. I might even rate a fishing cruise. It's the first big thing that ever came my way and I'm so grateful I can't find words to express myself. I'll get some books on campaigning and try to pick up the right dope. I'll drop my free-lance writing immediately and specialize. You've got to specialize these days."

"The salary won't begin till Congress adjourns," she said quickly.

"That's all right, Mrs. Slopshire. But when the salary begins, I want to be ready to earn it. I'll lay off the country clubs and spend more time at the Press Club. I can pick up a lot from those fellows. They won't mind my listening when they know I'm getting somewhere. Be sure and tell me when the Senator is having something up in the Senate, will you? I want to be there to take notes."

Having come to this amicable agreement, Aunt Olympia

asked him to stay and meet the girls. He accepted the invitation gratefully but Aunt Olympia could see that his mind was less on them than on the great opportunity which a bounteous Heaven had so surprisingly bestowed upon him. He responded courteously to the introductions but seemed not even to notice Adele's eyes.

"Not as good a reporter as Len Hardesty," thought Aunt Olympia. "Len hasn't overlooked a lash."

The girls, considerably to their surprise, found him pleasant, even likable, and a decided contrast to the explosively verbose Len Hardesty. He was slight in build, not tall, but lithe, with a suggestion of muscular strength in his easy movements. His voice was low, almost diffident, his smile boyishly winsome. He dressed with that studied and expensive carelessness that is so revealing to the practiced eye.

"Well, you may as well begin now as anytime," said Aunt Olympia. "Take a memorandum, will you?"

He hastened to comply, drawing out his fountain pen and a small, elegant date book in limp leather.

"I'll get a notebook," he said apologetically.

"Remind the Senator—or remind me to remind him—to be sure to write up and tell the farmer at Shires—that's our place up home—to have an extra suit of farm clothes for the Senator to borrow when he speaks at the Granges. Your clothes made me think of it," she explained.

Cecil looked down at his clothes with startled eyes.

"Oh, you're all right. You're not spotted," said Olympia reassuringly. "My mind works by contrast."

The girls talked him over when he had gone. They agreed that Len Hardesty had been unjustly prejudiced and that Cecil was a nice boy and they could stand having him

around. They thought his eager enthusiasm for the job rather pathetic.

"Yes, it's pathetic," assented Aunt Olympia. "Cece is all right. The trouble is that he's always been able to do what he wanted to instead of what he had to. He has enough money to live on, so he's never had to file his nose on the grindstone. It takes grindstone to make a newspaperman."

"He's really what you would call a sweet child," Helen wrote to Brick Landis. *"He seems so young and so unspoiled, and yet Aunt Olympia says he's had his own way all his life and had everything he has ever wanted. He is taking this job with such deadly seriousness that she is beginning to fear he will neither amuse us nor drive Len Hardesty mad, which was her main object. He began bringing up huge volumes on politics to get Aunt Olympia's opinion of them, but she stopped that. She said he could get his opinions from her and Dave Cooper. He has bought a new, perfectly gorgeous, simply huge, brief case and a new portable typewriter. And whenever he is not sitting raptly in the Senate gallery gazing down at his candidate and taking notes of every breath he draws, he is at the Press Club trying to make 'contacts.' I just wonder, Brick, if you take politics seriously enough. You didn't pay thirty dollars for a brief case and buy a new typewriter.*

"Anyhow, he is turning out better than they expected. Even Dave Cooper—who went off into explosive guffaws of laughter when Auntie told him about his assistant—admitted last night that 'the kid means business.' And from Dave Cooper that is a compliment!

"But people are different in Washington, Brick. Some-

thing about it changes them. . . . Don't let it change you, darling, I couldn't bear that. . . . Yet it has changed even us, as little as we really see of the inside of it. Adele is different. I don't understand her any more. You remember how I could always tell by a look just what she was thinking, or planning, or hoping? Not any more. I can't even tell whether she is in love with Len. (In fact, I can hardly tell about him, he is so very hilarious about it.) I can't tell whether she is in love with him or just amused; and he is *amusing. When I remarked that she always puts on her most becoming dresses when he comes she drew down her left eyelid like Aunt Olympia and said, 'Well, the more I upset him, the less harm he'll do Uncle Lancy.'*

"Limpy hasn't changed much; she still likes to eat and hates mathematics; but she is a whole lot slicker, and I'm sorry about that. It's a wonder she isn't spoiled to death. She is definitely their favorite, even more than Adele; though they are lovely to all of us. But they just hang on Limpy's words. You know she doesn't talk much—and what she says usually is worth listening to, though not always polite. When she opens her mouth they almost shut everybody else up to hear what she is going to say. And she gets everything she wants. All she has to do is say, 'Aw Uncle Lancy,' and look wistful and he wipes his glasses and says in his opinion let her do as she pleases. I think she is trying to work them, but I can't imagine what it can be for, for she has—we all have—more than we could possibly want.

"Oh, Brick, I do hope something really big, really important, happens while I am here, in the thick of things. Of course there's a great furore about the Court Fight and

Reorganization and Wages and Hours, but it's all talk, Brick. Talk, talk, talk. Reams and reams of Congressional Record; *all talk. They spend hours talking things out in committee, and then the bill goes to the floor and is patched and amended and sent from Senate to House and back again, and if anything ever does pass, the President is apt as not to veto it.*

"I tell you one thing, Brick Landis! This idea of tacking extraneous amendments on bills is simply pernicious. If you come to the House and they put a bill through to stop child labor and preserve the Sabbath and maintain freedom of the press, and you tack on some sneaky little rider to allow ten billions to Iowa to fight chinch bugs—well, as Aunt Olympia says, I'll 'divorce if not de-neck you.'"

Aunt Olympia went with Helen and Adele one afternoon to a large cocktail party—the invitations had said "tea." It was at the home of an outstanding Republican senator; they remembered that later, with some bitterness. Adele, left alone for a few minutes, was approached by a man, comparatively young, quite handsome, whom Adele instinctively labeled "a foreigner of some sort."

"I met you just after you came in, Miss Rutherford," he said pleasantly. "I am Gabriel d'Allotti. I couldn't possibly expect you to remember me in that crowd and that confusion, but by the same token, you could not possibly expect me not to remember you in any crowd or any confusion. You are unforgettable."

Adele smiled pleasantly. But she remembered Len Hardesty's warning, "Beware of embassies and attachés!"

"Are you with one of the embassies?" she asked.

"Alas, no! I have no such importance. I am just a young man trying to get along. But I know the embassy crowd and have friends among them, so I get around. May I bring you a drink?"

"Not now, thanks."

"To tell the truth, I am one of about a million foreigners trying to get the true American picture. I do free-lance correspondence for a few foreign papers and magazines, and naturally I am collecting my impressions for a book on America."

"If you get the American picture, you see better than I do," she admitted. "It looks a hodgepodge to me. Like modern painting. You can't tell whether that pink splash is a lady's arm or a platter of fried liver with onions! And then it turns out to be a bunch of grapes."

He laughed appreciatively. "I find the same difficulty, both with art and with America. But I am young and brave. I shall die struggling. Do you like Washington?"

"Oh, very much."

"Of course you get the right slant on it," he conceded. "It helps a good deal to be on the inside looking out and around, instead of, as I am, on the outside, waiting my turn at the knothole."

"Oh, but that's my trouble! I'm on the outside, too."

"You can't be far outside in the home of Senator Slopshire. He knows his America. I have often wondered about your senators. Do they act at home as they do on the floor?"

"Um, something the same. Uncle Lancy wipes his glasses; and blushes through his thinning hair when he is flattered."

"But what does he talk about? Does he merely say, as I would, how very beautiful you are? Does he complain about the eggs being overdone? Does he read his speeches to you?"

Adele laughed. "He reads them to Helen, but she asked for it," she admitted. "Helen is trying to learn politics from the ground up. She is my older sister."

"Dear me, is she going to run for something?"

"Maybe. Anyhow, she made up her mind to learn it. She goes to committees and reads the *Congressional Record* and at night they go to the library and argue for hours—over how many air defense guns are required here and there, and whether peace is preserved by more armaments or by disarming, and which end of a boat is the proper place to put guns and how many times the new destroyers can be torpedoed before they blow up—all that sort of thing."

"Dear me! It sounds quite horrifying. Doesn't he expound it all to you, too?"

"Oh, no. I don't listen. Limpy and I don't care for that sort of thing. We just pick out the best nuts and think of other things."

"Simply profound of you, I should say. More important things! Like, where's your yellow basket?"

"Oh, nothing half as profound as that. If we lost our yellow basket, Uncle Lancy would demand a congressional investigation and get it back for us."

Gabriel d'Allotti went away presently. He had not seen Helen before. Naturally, seeing Adele, one looked no further. He did not make the mistake of asking Adele to point out her sister. He was not so clumsy as that. He

asked someone else, a stranger, where she was—Senator Slopshire's niece. The stranger, being a man, pointed to Adele.

"No, I mean the other one; the studious one; her sister."

"Oh, yes, there is another one. . . . Let's see. . . . Oh, there she is; over by that window. The tall girl in the black hat and veil."

Gabriel d'Allotti introduced himself to Helen. "I've been having a delightful chat with your very lovely sister," he said with engaging candor. "She tells me that you and I have a great deal in common; that we are a pair of young innocents in the primary department of the big college of politics."

"Oh, I'm not up to the primary department yet," said Helen. "I'm still in the cradle. But I am trying so hard to understand things—and making very little headway."

"We must collaborate," he said. "We are having the same trouble. We have learned the 'c,' and the 'a,' and the 't'; now we must digest our wisdom and combine it into 'cat.' Perhaps two digestions, like heads, are better than one."

"It sounds promising," she said. "I confess that half the time I just listen and frown and don't even try to digest it. I keep hoping one acquires it gradually, like suntan, from persistent application. Perhaps between us we could get the 'c' and the 'a' and the 't' into a little kitten, at least, if not into a full-grown cat to begin with."

"It's a bargain," he said heartily, shaking hands with her. "I shall go at once and make diplomatic overtures to your aunt."

Inside of five minutes he had Aunt Olympia's attention.

"Mrs. Slopshire," he said ingratiatingly, "it is only fair to inform you, in strictest confidence, that I have been completely enchanted with your very lovely niece. How does one go about getting permission to call?"

Aunt Olympia glanced approvingly across the room at Adele. "She certainly got more than her share of looks," she said.

"Oh, you mean Miss Adele! Yes, she is exquisite. But personally I find myself rather more attracted the other way —to her sister—Miss Helen."

"Helen! Good heavens, you don't mean Helen? . . . Have you renounced your citizenship? I never heard of a foreigner preferring morals to beauty. Not," she added hastily, "that Adele is immoral."

"Well, it would be going too far to say that I have succumbed to a state of morals," he admitted. "In fact, I never suspected their presence; that shows how interesting she is. I find her quite brilliant and with a nice balance of humor."

"So she is! So she has! You're perfectly right," said Aunt Olympia heartily.

"Then does one call?"

"One comes to tea."

"Pardon my persistence. How soon does one come?"

"Tomorrow. It will be nice to have you. We're living very quietly of course—almost in seclusion—because of that terrible tragedy but I do want the girls to pick up what amusement they can."

"I'll be at my most humorous, I promise you. I'll go around and collect some good stories for them."

"Don't!" she ejaculated. "If you're hearing the same

ones I am, they are not fit for their young ears. Bring yourself—and leave your repertoire at home."

"Who's that man?" she asked, turning to a friend who stood near. "That one—making tracks for the punch bowl. With too much lotion on his hair."

"That? Why, that's Gabriel d'Allotti! You must know him. He goes everyplace."

"Oh, yes, I know him all right. But I've had so much trouble with that damn Alençon that I try not to pick up any foreign names. . . . Gabriel d'Allotti. . . . Yes, I know him."

"He is very interesting," Helen wrote to Brick Landis a couple of weeks later. *"And isn't it strange that he hasn't fallen in love with Adele? Well, he certainly has enlivened my study of the American system. He disagrees with me on nearly everything. He has the foreign idea of maintaining peace—that is, by bigger and better armaments. You'd almost think he was going to take out naturalization papers, he gets so wrought-up over America's lack of preparedness.*

"To tell the truth he knows a lot more than I do about the American system, though he doesn't approve of most of it. He comes to the house quite often and once he went with me to one of Uncle Lancy's committees and we did agree on one thing: that it is mighty hard for a dozen men sitting around a table to agree on a policy to save the nation; especially when the plan goes from them to the Senate, then to the House, back to the Senate, and back to conference again; and when they do finally agree on something, there's still the White House to reckon with.

"You needn't worry, darling. He hasn't the suggestion

of a crush on me. You can't fool women about that. Sometimes we think they have when they haven't, but we never think they haven't when they have. We're not that dumb. But we are both interested in the same things and it really is more exciting to argue with him than with Uncle Lancy. Uncle Lancy's always afraid of hurting my feelings, and Mr. d'Allotti isn't. But he isn't my type. I like 'em red headed and a bit roughed up.

"Oh, Brick, the session is nearly over and nothing has happened! Wouldn't you think one really big thing—an important thing—might happen while I am here, so I could get a glimpse beneath the surface?"

Chapter VI

Early in May, Aunt Olympia decided it was time for the assistant director of publicity, Cecil Dodd, to begin sending stories to the home papers. Olympia, who was an indefatigable maker of notes, had a list of "points" ready to start the campaign on her own and the girls' behalf; the Senator, except for incidental remarks in passing, was to be left to Dave Cooper. So she sent for Cecil and, at their laughing insistence on its educational value, permitted the girls to listen in.

"Now, you see, Cece," began Olympia, with great gusto, "politics is an elaborate and intricate system of build-up. That's all. Just build-up."

Cecil took his limp leather loose-leaf notebook from his monogrammed thirty-dollar brief case and, with a U. S. Senate pencil the Senator had given him made a note of "build-up."

"A lot of it has to be done in advance because it must be gradual. An untimely climax gums up the works. It has to be a gradual ascent to the wind-up. Dave, as you know, is already at work building up the Senator's record and so forth but we women of the Senator's household must have our domestic build-up. The woman-vote, you know. Though a lot of males fall pretty hard for that domestic angle, too."

Cecil, raptly attentive, made a note of "domestic angle."

"Now, in the first place, you must announce that certain

salient facts were gleaned from Mrs. Slopshire in an interview. . . . This is an interview. . . . I'm going to answer the questions you would ask me if you had enough experience. Now, in answer to what should be your first question, I reply, with deep feeling, no, we have not as yet given a moment's thought to the coming campaign. That is left to the future. We—the Senator and I—are so happy in having these dear children with us, our home life is so full, so serene—Never say 'exciting,' Cece, for your life! Say 'satisfying.' Our home life is so serene, so satisfying—you might say serenely satisfying, if you like—that so far we have been entirely wrapped up in quiet family interests."

The girls gasped. Cecil made fast notes with the Senate pencil.

Aunt Olympia descended then from the plane of an interview to practical counsel.

"At first, Cece, you'd better let Dave read your stuff and make suggestions if he wants to. You see, he knows our constituency. You can use the same ideas for different constituencies—not always, though; and frequently they must be couched in different words. For instance, some words will delight a Scandinavian or Irish settlement which would grossly offend a Ladies' Aid. Dave has the state mapped out and knows every prejudice in it. You can work that out with him."

"I've memorized the map," said Cecil. "That is, the regular map. I know the counties, towns and rivers, but there's nothing to indicate the prejudices."

"Dave'll indicate 'em," said Olympia drily. "Now, in writing about the girls, Cece, remember to use only what

we call innocent adjectives—'young, simple, girlish, ingenuous'—not 'innocuous'; be careful about that. 'Quiet dignity' is good, and 'innocent youth' and 'childish candor' are effective. If you absolutely have to mention beauty, qualify it; call it 'youthful beauty,' or 'girlish beauty.' But avoid beauty if possible. To the average mind, beauty goes with bathing contests and rich husbands. In mentioning their clothes always call them 'simple,' 'girlish' and 'inexpensive.' "

"They do not look inexpensive, though," he remarked, being one who knew clothes.

"Considering the effect they are going to have at the polls, they are cheap as dirt," said Aunt Olympia. "Never under any circumstances refer to elegance or luxury; these belong to royalists. Never say lavish or costly or luxurious. Say 'homey comfort,' or 'companionable hominess.' "

"By the way," he inquired suddenly, "have you cautioned the girls about mentioning our plans to—well, Len Hardesty? You know what he can do with the most casual remark."

Aunt Olympia ascended again to the interview. "We have not so much as mentioned the campaign to the children," said Olympia. "It is quite an ordeal, you know, and we do not want their young minds fretted until the time comes. Be sure to get this, Cece. We want them, as far as possible, to lead quiet, girlish, natural lives. We want them to be their sweet young selves. Even to win this election, we shall not permit any pressure to be brought on these children which would cause them to depart one iota from their own innocent naturalness. . . . Can you take shorthand, Cece? You'd better get that word for word. . . . As

for the campaign, we have no plans at all, having been too happily engrossed in domestic and family matters. . . . But be sure to work in that we have bought an old secondhand trailer from a neighbor of ours up home—for two hundred dollars, get that in! For our sound truck, we have picked up an old department store delivery truck and shall remodel it as well as we can to suit our purpose. After all, we are used to simple and unostentatious things and these will serve our purpose as well as the most luxurious equipment that riches could procure. . . . And work this in, Cece! We do hope that in planning our tour of the state, our good friends at home will remember that we are a devout and God-fearing family and that we want nothing to interfere with our attendance at divine worship on the Sabbath. We would greatly prefer to have no Sunday engagements of any kind, but out of consideration for those busy at week-day labors who are unable to receive us at any other time, we will strain a point and meet with them in a quiet and dignified manner. But we ask the wholehearted co-operation of our constituents—insofar as possible—to help us preserve the Sabbath from political activities."

"Should I say anything about how you expect things to turn out?" asked Cecil.

"In answer to your inquiry," said Olympia loftily, "Mrs. Slopshire assures you that we face the campaign with quiet and unwavering confidence as to the outcome. Our friends, our constituents, know the Senator; they know his record; they know his service to the state and nation. Trusting their judgment as we do, trusting their loyalty which has so often been proved, we have no doubt of the outcome. . . . You might say this, too, Cece: That both the Senator and

Mrs. Slopshire are personally grieved that they are obliged to wage a political campaign against a minister of the church, their former friend and pastor. At the same time, realizing that thoughtful people would be unwilling to trust their spiritual guidance and the spiritual guidance of their children to a doctor, a lawyer, or a statesman, we are sure they will feel the same reluctance to entrust the delicate machinery of government to the unpracticed hand of a former preacher. . . . I'll bet at that he knows his Constitution better than his Bible! . . . Don't make a note of that, Cece."

"That's very good, Mrs. Slopshire," Cecil said approvingly. "I see just how I can bring this out, one thing leading to another."

"In answer to your inquiry," said Aunt Olympia, with a benign smile, "Mrs. Slopshire declares firmly, no, neither she nor the children will participate in the campaign in any way. Not in the slightest degree."

"Aw, Aunt Olympia!" wailed Limpy, and both Helen and Adele looked disappointed and surprised.

"Not participate!" ejaculated Cecil. "What's the trailer for? What's the build-up for?"

"But," went on Aunt Olympia firmly, "devoted housewife that Mrs. Slopshire is known to be, naturally my place is with my husband, particularly in the trying days of the campaign. And obviously, my children must go with me, for we are their only home, whether we are campaigning in a broken-down trailer or living quietly on the farm near Maysville. We shall accompany the Senator; but no campaigning! Absolutely none! 'One politician in the family is enough,' Mrs. Slopshire declared, with a light laugh. Personally, my tastes are completely domestic."

She winked cheerfully at the spellbound girls.

"Be sure to get this in, Cece. Being entirely domestic and housewifely, as I am, I accompany the Senator to take care of him, to see that he eats properly cooked food at regular hours and gets sufficient rest. We go only to look after his health, his food and his comfort. I take care of his clothes. . . . Make a note of that, will you, Limpy? Remind me to buy a needle and some darning cotton. . . . But we play no politics. The voters of our state are not constituents to me, they are dear old friends and neighbors. . . . You'd better get that word for word, Cece. You can't improve on it. . . . Friends and neighbors! And when they know these precious children as we know them, they will be their friends and neighbors, too."

"Am I sprouting a halo, Adele?" put in Limpy neatly. "I seem to be going angelic by the minute."

"Cece, remind me to add a motorcycle escort to the cavalcade," said Aunt Olympia, reverting again to the practical. "We'll need him to carry the damn socks back and forth to Hilda to rip out what I put in."

"Do you make speeches, Auntie?" asked Adele. "I'd love to hear you make a speech."

"You'll have to be careful on the radio though, or they'll cut you off," Limpy reminded her.

" 'No indeed,' declared Mrs. Slopshire laughingly. 'I do not make speeches.' . . . Except perhaps, privately to the Senator. No indeed! No speeches. All I do is put a little ginger in Del's. . . . Don't put that in, Cece."

Although Adele had heard Cecil's hint about Len Hardesty without change of expression, without flicker of long eyelash, she did not forget it. That night when they were

all together at dinner she said cheerfully and yet with gravity:

"Darlings, would it be better—better politics, I mean—for us to see no more of one Len Hardesty until after the election? I can get along without him, you know. And if it would be less dangerous it is quite all right with me."

Aunt Olympia, spokesman for the Senator as well as herself, offered a prompt disclaimer.

"Not at all, Adele. It's nice of you to make the offer, but it is not necessary. Of course, we may accidentally let something drop that he can pick up—and if he can, he will. But Len's quite a dropper himself and I'm no slouch at pickings-up. And if it wasn't Len hanging around it would be somebody else and probably someone a good deal less interesting." She frowned thoughtfully for a moment. "In fact, the closer you keep him to your finger tips, the less good he's doing Brother Wilkie—and the less harm to us. I'm not sure but you should marry him and put him into the discard once and for all. And a damn good riddance."

The Senator was so touched at the generous thoughtfulness of Adele's offer that he wiped his glasses, one pair after the other, for a solid hour, and discontinued only when Helen came in from the library to ask his help.

"Uncle Lancy," she said, "I find I'm terribly vulnerable in my national defenses. You'll have to straighten me out. Just look at this map."

She spread a relief map of North America on his knees and dropped on a stool beside him.

"Heavens, Helen, have you gone back to geography?" said Adele.

"I'll go back with you," offered Limpy quickly. "I'll swap you my trig for your geog. I'm very good at geography. What do you have to do—fill in rivers and mountains?"

"No," said Helen. "I just have to build forts and guns and establish submarine bases and scrape up a few aerial bombers. . . . Now, look, Uncle Lancy! . . . This is the Canadian border. Not a fortification for miles! Think of that!"

"Have the Canadians declared war?" asked Limpy.

"No, and we say they never will. And probably they won't. . . . But that's not the half of it. Suppose Great Britain got messed up in Europe—say with Russia. That would keep her busy. Then suppose Germany and Italy got together and decided to colonize Canada. They could come galloping right over and England couldn't do a thing. And there they'd be, right next to us, and no defenses."

"What's come over you, Helen? I thought you were a pacifist."

"So I am. But I have been talking to re-armamenters. They say you can't be peaceful without preparedness. And just look at that Canadian border!"

"All right, look at the Canadian border. You're right. It's vulnerable," agreed the Senator, smiling.

"Then take the Mexican border."

"A Mexican invasion would start us all eating tamales and beans, wouldn't it?" asked Limpy.

"Mexico herself wouldn't invade," said Helen, patly. "Ah, but suppose she had alliances; strong alliances. Say with Japan. . . . Very vulnerable!"

"The Mexican border is better defended than you real-

ize," said the Senator. "We haven't got all those forts and flying fields and military camps down there just for the sake of the climate. Big cities are the vulnerable points for an enemy. There are no very large cities down there and we have a scattering of defenses from the border northward," said the Senator, becoming interested, almost defensive.

"And just look at our Atlantic coast!" Helen was full of her subject. "Disgraceful! Just look, from way up here at the tip of Maine clear down to Panama! And how much of a fleet have we got? How many airplane bombers? How many subs and dreadnaughts and—what else should one have?—Why, it's an open temptation to the covetous, like leaving pennies around in sight of children who love lollypops."

"You can join the Red Cross, Helen. That'll help," said Adele.

"You can be a Girl Scout, and coax Uncle Lancy to buy you a bow and arrow," said Limpy.

"The trouble with people who go around talking about national defenses," said Uncle Lancy pleasantly, liking his attentive audience, "is that for the most part they don't know what they are talking about. Personally, as you know, Helen, I, while an ardent and consistent pacifist, am in favor of a full defense program from bombs to bandages. But that Atlantic seaboard is better defended than you think it is! We've got a lot of very impressive works spread out along there. They look like mere show places to the visiting tourist, but there's more under the surface than shows on top. You don't suppose the shipyards up in Maine and New Hampshire are undefended, do you? And in Mary-

land and Virginia? You don't suppose Boston is standing wide open, do you? The most doubting of Thomases must realize that New York harbor has a gun or two tucked away somewhere. And come on down the coast! Here's Washington! I doubt if even Nye would vote to destroy the defenses of Washington, and there's a pacifist if ever lived one. And making money at it, too!"

"Making money at it! Dear me, I must be overlooking something. I'm a simply rabid pacifist, but nobody's offered me a cent for it so far."

"You have to be more than pacific to get paid for it," said Uncle Lancy smiling. "You have to be gifted with the silver tongue of oratory and the jeweled darts of a melodious vocabulary."

"You have to have more than that, too, to be a Nye," said Aunt Olympia suddenly. "You have to have those smoldering, somber eyes and that lean, high-minded face, the face of a zealot with just the suggestion of latent fires."

"I don't think he's as good-looking as Uncle Lancy!" said Limpy.

"That's because you haven't reached college," said Aunt Olympia. "That's the first thing girls learn in college, in my opinion. If Nye is defeated for the Senate, I daresay half the girls' colleges will have to close down for lack of patronage. They just keep sticking it out, year after year, so they can come down in the spring and hang over the gallery rails and watch him smolder. I'll bet if Gallup took a poll of co-eds, they'd vote for a one-man government in Nye's person."

"I think his looks are all right, myself," admitted Limpy. "But Uncle Lancy is more my type."

Uncle Lancy, pleasurably flushed even to his hands, finished wiping his glasses.

"Well, on the whole, I'm as pacific as he is," he admitted modestly. "Perhaps, in some ways, even more so. At least, I don't go around smoldering over banked fires, as Ollie says he does, and smoldering fires are usually explosive. . . . Yes, I'm pacific, all right; but on the other side of the fence. I don't go out of my way looking for rattlesnakes, but if I run into one, I like to have a club handy to take care of him. That's the kind of pacifist I am."

"Then you really think we are not so vulnerable as the rearmamenters seem to think," pursued Helen.

"Our most vulnerable point is our gullibility," said the Senator drily. "If anybody tells us he doesn't want to fight, we just can't help taking him at his word. I daresay a snake says the same thing just before he strikes, only we do not understand the snake's language. If we did, we'd probably believe him."

"It would work up a land-office business in snake-bite remedies," said Aunt Olympia.

"But we're not what some people call plain suckers, at that," said Uncle Lancy. "We've got strategic points fairly well taken care of, and we've got second and third—and fourth-line—defenses spread clear across the country. We haven't enough, Helen. I admit that. We're working at it though. The trouble is, it's not such hard work building up defenses as talking down the fanatics."

"Well, I'm relieved," said Helen. "I wasn't sure I could sleep tonight. Of course, I'm for peace myself. . . . Not quite at any price, perhaps, but at any reasonable price."

Helen was having almost as busy a time as Aunt Olym-

pia herself, for she continued her pursuit of political enlightenment so avidly that Limpy's logarithms were overlooked for days at a time. Dull teas, deadly receptions, boresome luncheons, congressional clubs, she attended them assiduously; she had to, in order to help Brick when the time came.

"And how about this garden party at the British Embassy?" Aunt Olympia demanded one day. "We've got to answer it. Do you want to go?"

"I'd love to," said Helen promptly.

"Wasn't I invited?" asked Adele jealously.

"Yes, we're all invited. . . . All right. I'll accept for you girls and us, if you really want to go, and decline for Limpy."

"Aw, Uncle Lancy!" wailed Limpy. "I've never seen a lord!"

"You haven't!" he ejaculated. "Well, well, think of that now. They're no great shakes, in my opinion, but if you want to see one, go and take a good look."

"He's not a lord, anyhow, he's just a younger son," said Aunt Olympia.

"Is that a lord-in-the-making?" asked Adele interestedly.

"Is that the same as a lord-on-the-make?" demanded Limpy.

"A lord-in-the-making-on-the-make would be something, wouldn't it?" suggested Adele.

"Certainly," assented Uncle Lancy. "Take a good look, if you want to."

"Del!" protested Aunt Olympia. "Why, she's a mere child!"

"Well, she's a nice child," he insisted. "If a cat can look

at a king, I reckon a child—a nice child—can have a squint at a lord-on-the-make—I mean, in-the-making. There's nothing worldly about garden parties. In my opinion, it's children they're given for."

"Garden parties," said Aunt Olympia severely, "are worth the wages of a gardener for the cigarette ashes they keep off the rugs alone!"

"It was very nice," Helen wrote to Brick Landis. *"They served champagne punch under a marquee at one end of the garden and the refreshments a long way off at the other end under another. Aunt Olympia said that was to make it harder and take longer for guests to go dashing back and forth, consuming liquor and refreshments. They served exquisite big strawberries and an American substitute for Devonshire cream. You know how Limpy loves strawberries. Uncle Lancy braved that formidable line of butlers three times to get extra portions for her. He said she was entitled to still more under her quota because she doesn't drink champagne. Limpy said she didn't think the Ambassador was half as lordly-looking as Uncle Lancy and he wiped his glasses for ten minutes and the top of his head turned so pink that somebody asked if he was sunburned. He stopped the car on the way home and bought her six big boxes of strawberries and I daresay she'll break out in a rash.*

"The invitation said from five to seven and exactly at seven o'clock the orchestra came out from behind the bushes and played God Save the King *and everybody stood up, and the chairs just seemed to melt away out of sight and everybody went home.*

"Limpy told Aunt Olympia she ought to try that way of getting rid of people at her parties when she invites them from five till seven, for a dozen or more stick around till nine or ten and Len Hardesty doesn't go till he is put out. But Aunt Olympia said it wouldn't work with Americans; said somebody would slip the orchestra leader a dollar to 'swing it,' and they'd all start dancing and she'd have them on her hands for breakfast.

"Adele complained that they did not serve nearly so much as at most of the Embassy things, the South African Union, for instance, where it was a banquet as it always is at the Siamese Legation. Aunt Olympia says it's the law of compensation; the smaller the nation, the bigger the feed.

"I finally put Gabriel d'Allotti to shame on the pacifist question by proving that we are not as vulnerable as we look and sound. Uncle Lancy pointed out all the hidden defenses to me and I made a lovely map of them. I'm keeping it for you, in case you go on National Defense.

"And, oh, Brick, weren't you surprised at Ed Eicher retiring from the race for Congress after he had won renomination in the primary? And what a break for us Iowa Republicans! Aunt Olympia was furious. She said in her opinion it was a congressman's Christian duty to hang onto a good seat instead of chucking it to the wolves. By wolves she means us, R., Iowa. She wanted Uncle Lancy to call him up and give him a piece of her mind!"

On a morning in June, the girls were amused to find Aunt Olympia sitting at her desk, very red of face, frowning intently at a thick pad of paper and chewing the rubber of a pencil with a long, sharp point. As they watched, she

bent forward, smiling broadly, and wrote a few lines, very fast. When she had finished with a big black period, she looked up at the girls with a slight smirk.

"It can't be her expense account," said Limpy. "For even in a dumb thing like trig they figure things out in numbers."

"It's my speech," said Aunt Olympia, obviously well pleased with what she had written.

"Your speech!"

"For the campaign," she explained.

"You know, Helen," said Limpy reproachfully, "that trigonometry of yours has got me clear off the English language. That's what cosines and tangents do to a brilliant mind. I understood her—trigonometrically speaking—to say she doesn't make speeches."

"You understood me all right," said Aunt Olympia. "But there always comes a time, quite late in the campaign—I select the time—when the Senator is delayed in an important conference—perhaps with Farley, or maybe just a long-distance call from the White House—and just to fill in the gap till he comes I arise and make a few extemporaneous remarks. And I always like to be prepared. Len Hardesty taught me that trick and it's a good one. He helped write my last speech and it was the hit of the campaign. But now I can do all right alone."

"You know, Brick," Helen wrote, quite anxiously, *"there's no getting around the fact that this is the crookedest racket you ever heard of. Not exactly crooked perhaps, but definitely bent. Maybe you'd better withdraw before it's too late and stick to groceries. I think I can get*

you an appropriation from Congress. Brick, you can't believe a word anybody says. Aunt Olympia looks so honest, so open-hearted and frank, and here she is, even before Congress has adjourned, writing and practicing her extemporaneous speech to fill in a strategic moment that she selects herself.

"Brick, when we do get around to getting married, if you stick to politics, I warn you that if you rise at the wedding to make a few extemporaneous remarks, I shall arise myself and publicly denounce you. I've learned that there is nothing extemporaneous in politics."

The next time Len flew down to Washington, Adele, who had what was virtually a unique quality for a beauty, straightforward frankness, looked him gravely in the face.

"I told the folks that if it is at all dangerous, or if it embarrasses them in any way, I would not see you again until after the election."

"Figuring me, I suppose, as some sort of electrical current that can be turned off or on at will."

"I meant it, Len."

"Yes, dear adorable little devil, I'll bet you did. What did they say?"

"They said it was not necessary; that you do not embarrass them at all."

"Well, they embarrass me no end," he said bitterly. "Sitting around making me talk politics when I could relax and gaze into your eyes. . . . Not that there's anything very relaxing about your eyes. . . . They embarrass me by making me fight them when I'm on their side. They're crooked, beautiful! I hate to see you messed up with them. If I

could just tell the constituents what they roped me into, they'd elect the brats in a minute."

"Len," she said hesitantly, "they are so friendly to you and treat you so nicely; you wouldn't use anything you hear here against them, would you?"

"Sure I would, if I had a chance. That's my job. And they'd use me, too, in a minute they would, and no doubt do. They ruined this campaign for me, pinning me down to the other side and then springing you on me!"

"But, Len, how could you do anything against them—when they are—are so magnificent? To you! And to us, too!"

"Because, darling, if I don't pull every trick from my bag, they'll be the first to despise me. This is a job, Adele."

"I don't like it," she said faintly.

"Adele, I've known those two a long time. They are swell sports. They're game as they come. But if I fell down on this job because I like them—and adore you—they'd be the first to sneer. And you'd be next. Listen, sweet! I don't want them beaten, but I'm going to try my damnedest to beat them. If I don't, do you think Olympia will ever feel the same? We can't beat them, unless we get some breaks I can't foresee. That's what I'm on the lookout for—the breaks. And it will mean a lot for me if I put it across. The Governor has promised me anything I want. Anything! We could get married then. I could take care of you."

"I don't want to be taken care of—at their expense. You don't know how lovely they are to us. I don't want anything—taken from them."

"Talk to Olympia," Len said. "She knows this racket.

It's always a scrap. They can take a beating, but they can't stand a quitter."

"I think it is—despicable," she said, and there were tears, very becoming tears, in her lovely eyes.

"It's the democratic form of government," he said gently, and kissed the tears away. "But don't take my word for it, sweet. Ask them."

"But if you were with us, Len, it would be so perfect. To have you go with us, and plan with us, and be on our side—"

"Yes, it would be perfect. But if I broke my contract, it would be the best weapon the Governor could hold against him. They would claim that by Influence and Money the Senator had treacherously hired a man to break his contract. It would beat him quicker than anything else."

"But Len, hasn't principle got anything to do with it? Do you think the Governor would make a better Senator than Uncle Lancy?"

"No, sweet, I don't. But that hasn't a thing in the world to do with it. . . . No, I don't think so. But thinking isn't my job. Publicity is."

"It's appalling, Brick," Helen wrote distractedly. *"I'm just terrified of the whole thing. It all simmers down to the fact that the outs want in, and the ins want to stay where they are. I don't believe there is a single thing at stake but that. Brother Wilkie and Uncle Lancy agree on almost every point, except that the Governor thinks the Republicans could do a better job finishing what the Democrats started. I asked Aunt Olympia what is the real issue in this campaign.*

"'The issue!' she boomed. 'The issue? Why, the issue is just whether the Senator is going to be beaten by that treacherous worm who ought to get back in the pulpit where he belongs.'

"All the time, Brick, all the money, all the scheming and planning, all the heartaches—just for that."

Aunt Olympia was packed and ready for adjournment by the tenth of May. Still Congress dawdled, filibustered, talked. She called the Senator's office a couple of times a day to ask the prospects, and though she received no encouragement, she did not unpack. She worked pretty steadily at her "lists," which by this time required a filing cabinet. There were lists of entertainments to be given when she reached home; telephone calls to be made; supplies to be acquired; souvenir gifts to be purchased for the children of influential constituents; lists of doubtful acquaintances to be conciliated; lists of things to do, or write, or speak to Cece or Dave about; lists of last-minute hints to the girls.

Occasionally she got mixed up. She went into Woodward and Lothrop's one day, took out her list, lifted her eyeglasses and read the first item.

"Ladies' Aid Society." She read it twice before she could believe her eyes. "Ladies' Aid Society."

She laughed quite merrily at the mistake. "No, thanks, my dear, no more Ladies' Aids for me," she said to the salesgirl. "I've got too many as it is. I brought the wrong list."

The second week in June she sent Hilda on up to Maysville with most of the baggage and with orders to get things

ready for their arrival. It couldn't be long now. The most stentorian congressional voice was frayed and rasping.

"A hog caller couldn't stick it out much longer," she told the girls hopefully.

And then, on June 16th, Congress adjourned.

Helen drew a deep, tired breath. "At last! It's over!" she ejaculated.

Olympia's snort was deep and gusty. She raised her shoulders like a champing Pegasus pluming for flight.

"Over!" she boomed. "Over! Why, it hasn't even begun!"

Chapter VII

Aunt Olympia was justly proud of Shires, the senatorial estate near Maysville. Maysville, the capital of the state, headquarters both of Republican and Democratic state committees, was an ideal location for the Senator in a campaign year. It was an ideal location for Len Hardesty, too, though working for the Opposition. "Not even a preaching slave-driver with seven brats can keep me on the go day and night all summer," he told Adele confidentially. "I've got to relax occasionally, and I expect to do all my summer's relaxing at Shires."

The Senator's estate was a tidy and prosperous farm, with meadows for grazing; with orchards, gardens and small tracts of corn, alfalfa and wheat to provide food for their livestock, all in strict accord with the highest conception of what a senatorial farmer's country place should be. A small creek gurgled prettily through the green meadow, dammed up at one point under wide spreading willows to make a swimming pool; "swimming hole," they called it. There was a tennis court and a croquet ground; and through the shady woods that spread over the hills beyond the house were pleasant saddle paths.

The house itself was low, rambling and wide, with porches on every side; with high cupolas and low stoops and broad fireplaces; with great rooms, huge windows and crystal chandeliers; artistically old-fashioned to the last detail. Yet the old-fashionedness of it was more apparent

than real, for it was only ten years old and its equipment was modern to the extreme. "Old looks and new conveniences" was Aunt Olympia's idea of a home, and she had its realization in Shires.

In planning their arrival after the adjournment of Congress—Aunt Olympia always had a plan for everything minutely laid out in advance—she had been bitterly torn between natural thrift and pride. She wanted the girls to see Shires first in all its pristine beauty, and yet, wishing to safeguard and preserve that beauty, she trembled physically at thought of the havoc to be wrought on it by the first horde of friendly callers. Love triumphed. The girls should see Shires as it was; for was it not to be their future home with her and the Senator—or, at least, Limpy's future home? This was a supreme tribute to her devotion to the girls, for her esthetic nature usually played second or even third fiddle to the utilitarian.

She ordered Hilda to have the place in the pink of perfection for the girls' arrival.

"And be ready for a lightning change," she said grimly. "Have the campaign drapes and curtains ready. Get the summer rugs cleaned. Have the packing cases and moth-proof bags opened and aired. Tell Martin to get the tubs and fences and railings ready to put up at a minute's notice. Lay in moth-balls and wire screening and plenty of bolts and nails and padlocks. Tell Martin to have the tree guards painted and laid out. . . . But be sure to have everything out of sight when we get there. I want them to see it right the first time."

The girls, remembering the down-at-the-heel parsonages that had been their previous homes, were almost speech-

lessly thrilled with Shires. There wasn't a farm in Iowa could hold a candle to it. They liked everything about it, from the honeysuckle and wild roses clambering over the porch rails with such apparent abandon—though really guided and compelled by the stern hand of the farm manager, Martin—to the cunning chicken incubators and brooder houses.

"Yes, it's nice," assented Aunt Olympia modestly, crimson with delight in their delight. "But we never should have called it Shires. Too aristocratic, Shires is. Now that the tide of public opinion has turned against elegance, we'll probably lose a thousand votes by that name. If we'd called it Cozy Rest or Happy Home or Old Mill Meadows we'd be better off."

"Why don't you change it, then, just till the campaign's over?"

Aunt Olympia shook her head. "Len Hardesty," she explained briefly. "He'd get a nation-wide hook-up to accuse us of finagling for votes."

She was anxiously apologetic about the rooms she had assigned them. "Now, you don't have to take them unless you want to," she assured them. "We've got plenty of rooms, and after the campaign you can have one apiece, and easy. But during the campaign we have extras here nearly every night, committeemen, or reporters, and we have to save a room for Cece Dodd, and Dave will be here a good deal. So if you can be comfortable in just two rooms till after the campaign, it'll be a help."

The girls were joyously sure they could be comfortable. Aunt Olympia had chosen two connecting rooms for them at the opposite end of the hall from the huge room—with

two baths—that she occupied with the Senator. In the larger of the two rooms were twin beds, which Aunt Olympia thought would be nice for Helen and Adele; the smaller room, with a wide bed—the best bed in the house it was, too—she thought would be all right for Limpy, who wasn't really full grown yet and ought to be by herself. Aunt Olympia had already figured out that when Helen and Adele were gone—as they would be—Limpy could have the whole suite, with the big room made over into a parlor where she could entertain her young friends in cozy privacy. But she did not mention that.

For a full week after their arrival, though she suffered for her treasures, Aunt Olympia restrained her housewifely inclinations. She permitted callers, both constituents and sightseers, to trample her velvety lawn, tread roughly on her neatly trimmed hedges and flower beds, scatter ashes and cake crumbs on her oriental rugs. One week of agonizing proof it was of her love for Limpy.

Then, almost overnight, Shires became a Cozy Rest. The oriental rugs and brocade tapestries were removed and stored in moth-proof containers in the attic. The best chairs and more costly small tables were removed. Pieces of bric-a-brac, vases, pictures, expensive ash trays and cigarette boxes, finely bound books, were stowed away in locked drawers.

"Never leave any little nice thing lying about loose in a campaign," she said. "To constituents, anything small enough to go in a pocket is a souvenir."

Even the grounds shared the campaign renovation. The rarest and most treasured of small shrubs and plants were removed to the greenhouse, which was padlocked. Stout

grilled iron fences enclosed the flower gardens and bushes. Little railings shut off the place where visitors were not to walk.

"Why don't you put up Keep-Off-The-Grass signs?" suggested Limpy.

"They wouldn't keep anybody off, in the first place," explained Aunt Olympia. "And people would swipe them for souvenirs so we'd have to have fresh ones every day. And if some tourist soiled her dress on new paint, she'd sue us."

During the remainder of June and through July, the family gave itself up to quiet rest and recreation. There were a few speeches to be made, and the Senator did a great deal of work in his upstairs study with Dave Cooper and Jim Allen, the state chairman, with any number of county chairmen and visiting committees; did still more work at the Democratic Headquarters in town.

Cecil Dodd joined them at Shires on the fifth of July, and an old roadster was turned over to him to travel about the state in, meeting committees, arranging rallies, hobnobbing with the press and getting his bearings in general.

In July, Aunt Olympia, referring to her "Social Activities" list, invited the Ladies' Aid Society of the Methodist Church in Maysville to a garden party at Shires. The girls, who thought they knew Ladies' Aids, were amazed at the quantity of refreshments she planned for this event.

"Dear me, it must be a huge Aid," said Helen. "You have food enough for two hundred."

"There'll be two hundred," said Aunt Olympia. "Though it's not a very large Aid. They'll bring all their children and cousins and aunts-by-marriage. They'll take advantage of it being election year and invite all their out-of-town

friends—who would visit them anyhow sometime this summer—and offer my garden party as the main attraction."

There were two hundred and fifty at the garden party.

"Most of 'em I never saw before in my life and half of those I have seen don't even belong to our church. I've been counting noses and I've already checked nine Baptists, three Catholics and a Christian Scientist," she whispered bitterly.

Aunt Olympia greeted them all with suave urbanity, and sent Martin to town to buy more refreshments. She did not show resentment when Mrs. Farrell, the president of the Society, arose to make a few remarks, of which the first sentence or two were innocuous words of greeting and welcome home, and the united thanks of the Aid for this lovely party. Then the purring voice took on a more sinister note.

"And Sister Slopshire, I do hope you noticed our new church carpet. You remember that filthy, ragged one that's been a disgrace to our faith the last fifteen years! Well, I said to the ladies, 'Ladies, I simply cannot bear to have poor dear Brother Slopshire—and Sister Slopshire—set foot on that old rag again.' I said, 'Ladies, it's not only unsanitary and unhygienic, it's absolutely unsafe. Somebody'll trip on it and sue the congregation. And if poor dear Senator Slopshire should trip, I'd be so ashamed I couldn't lift up my head again.' So we got the carpet to surprise you and I am sorry to say we have not yet got it paid for, and knowing how generous you always are, and how you always co-operate with us ladies in our forward movements, I just wondered if you wouldn't like to contribute something."

Aunt Olympia even smiled as she wrote the check and bowed graciously in reply to the fluttering applause that greeted her act, but the girls recognized the flicker of the left eyelid, the uptilt of the left corner of her mouth.

"I don't know what they think their votes are worth!" she said bitterly when they had gone. "And on top of the check, those refreshments cost me fifty dollars, and they trampled my lawn and let their kids break the hammock. . . . Women are simply insatiate! A man will come through for a good cigar and a bottle of ale, but you can't satisfy women."

The Senator had no real opposition in the Primary and spent only enough time and money on it to strengthen the party machine and lay the groundwork for the real battle. The girls thought that was a lucky break for the Senator but Aunt Olympia was bitter about that, too.

"It just makes it tougher in the end," she said. "Makes it more intensive. If you have to fight for your life all summer you can sort of spread it out. But no! Without a primary fight, it jams up on you all at once. Too bad we're not down south. There the Primary ends it. You get the nomination and you're elected."

"Isn't that true of a good many other states, too?" asked Helen.

"It used to be true of some states," admitted Aunt Olympia. "Some states just went Republican and some went Democratic, but not any more. Except Maine and Vermont, of course. And from what I've heard of those states, it doesn't seem worth while living there even to win an election."

The preliminary activities of the campaign were of a

mild sort, more in the nature of social pleasantries than warfare. There was frequent attendance at church suppers, fish fries, shore dinners, club picnics and firemen's balls. There were a few speeches to be made, photographs to be posed for, interviews given and disseminated.

There was a constant flow of visitors in and out of Shires. The velvety lawn was trampled by constitutents. The small railings were knocked down and broken, requiring almost daily repair. Busses and private cars disgorged picnickers on the greensward, who asked—and obtained—permission to eat beside the Senator's gurgling creek or under his spreading oaks. They threw paper plates in the pool and besought the Senator for autographs and insisted on having their pictures taken with the three sweet orphans.

The Senator had figured that six weeks would suffice for the intensive, swing-of-the-state campaign. But he had not reckoned with Brother Wilkie. Six weeks was not enough for the Opposition. In July, while the Senator was blissfully basking in a breathing spell, the Governor swung into action. To take the edge off the Senator's homey old trailer, he established the children, the beldame and Len Hardesty in a covered wagon and hit the trail.

Twice every Sunday he was guest preacher in some pulpit or other, with his entourage—except Len Hardesty—ensconced piously in a prominent pew while he dispensed spiritual food and political propaganda to the worshipers. One week the state papers carried a photograph showing Brother Wilkie, his hand on the Bible, gazing upward, presumably at Heaven, while in the front pew sat the blinking beldame and the rapt children.

"Humph!" said Olympia. "Looks like an ad for God. . . .

I'll bet Len Hardesty didn't pose that in person. They couldn't drag him to church."

But it worried her. On the next morning at breakfast she said abruptly, "We've got to have more pictures of the girls."

"Auntie! Not more pictures! There couldn't be any more pictures!"

"Oh, yes, there could! You'll be surprised. Let's see now. We can't show you in the trailer till we get started. We've had pictures of you picking apples, gathering eggs, in the hammock, ready for garden parties, playing tennis, swimming, at croquet, and on horseback. That's all. What else could we have, Del?"

"You don't need to have them doing anything," he said. "Just a picture of them doing nothing at all is a sight for sore eyes."

"Humph!... Cece, I suppose, as usual, you have no ideas on the subject?"

"I agree with the Senator," said Cecil Dodd, who had become a Slopshire-for-anything devotee. "Any picture of the girls is a work of art."

"I don't want a work of art. I want a work of politics. . . . Mmmmmmmmm!" she murmured reflectively. She looked at the girls. Her eyes wandered to the window.

"We haven't had any farm pictures!" she shouted triumphantly.

"Oh, yes, we have!" disclaimed Adele promptly. "You had us cutting roses and gathering eggs and picking apples and in the hammock and—"

"I mean farm work. We're just old-fashioned farmer folk, you know," she said benignly, "and we're not above

turning our hand to the real work of the farm when there's a rush on. Del," she turned on the Senator sharply, "what the devil's the matter with your alfalfa?"

The Senator looked anxiously at his plate. . . . No, it was his usual shredded wheat biscuit.

"There's nothing the matter with my alfalfa that I know of. If you want alfalfa, you'll have to ask Martin. I don't even know where he planted it this year. In fact, I'm not sure but he cut down the acreage to collect from Agriculture."

"The girls," said Aunt Olympia, "will help rake the alfalfa. 'Phone for the photographer, Cece."

"You'd better 'phone for Martin, first," said the Senator mildly. "And make sure he's got some alfalfa."

"Make a note of this, Cece," said Aunt Olympia, whose mind raced from inspiration to detail with lightning speed. "Tomorrow. Ten o'clock. The girls will rake a little and then ride home, laughing gaily, on top of the hayrack. We'll have a simple luncheon—doughnuts and milk—spread under the trees for the return. The farmers will eat this up. . . . I don't suppose you brought any overalls, Cece?"

"Overalls?" he repeated vaguely.

"And a denim shirt. You can be an extra hand and save expense. That's why we're doing this work ourselves—to save expense," she decided suddenly. "Hilda! Have we got any sunbonnets?"

"Sunbonnets!" Hilda frowned. "What's a sunbonnet?"

"You couldn't get sunbonnets for love or money, Auntie," said Adele. "Unless you get in touch with a theatrical costumer."

"We haven't time for that. You can wear those floppy beach hats, then, but be sure to toss back your heads or take them off when you're snapped. . . . Make a note of this, Cece. 'Be sure to order denim shirt and overalls for Dodd.' . . . Helen, you'd better not go, I think," she said reluctantly. "It is rather too childish for you, being the oldest. You can lay the table under the trees and pass the doughnuts. Make a note of this, Cece. Important message from the Senator to the press tomorrow at eleven-thirty so the reporters'll be on hand."

"My dear, if you send reporters out to watch the girls rake hay they'll know it is a plant," he reminded her.

"You silly fool," she said fondly. "I won't send them out. I didn't work with Len Hardesty without getting on to newspapermen. First thing they'll say is, 'Where are the girls?' I'll say, 'Oh, they're out helping get the hay in.' And they'll grab three doughnuts apiece and dash for the alfalfa patch and leave you in the middle of a sentence. Make a note of this, Cece. Tell Hilda to get two hundred doughnuts. She can heat them up in the oven and we'll say she is cooking them while we eat."

"I haven't got anything important to give out," protested the Senator.

"Make a note of this, Cece. Tell Dave to think up something for the Senator to announce."

Aunt Olympia's spirit was contagious. By noon the plans were well under way. The doughnuts had been ordered. Dave had concocted the Senator's message and notified the reporters to be on hand. The photographers had their instructions. Martin was cutting the alfalfa. The girls had their costumes—sturdy white low-heeled shoes,

floppy wide-brimmed hats and trim little "cotton" dresses of finest French gingham, laid out in readiness. Cecil had submitted himself for approval in new denim shirt and overalls. To his relief, he found them becoming.

"I swear I look as good as a chorus man," he admitted cheerfully.

"He does at that," said Aunt Olympia uneasily. "Do you think he's too theatrical, Del? . . . Don't wear gloves, Cece. You've got to pitch hay in your bare hands and if you break your nails you can add a manicure to your expense account. You'd better not shave tomorrow; I'm sorry you shaved today. But lay off the razor till it's over. Dirt farmers never shave during harvest."

At half-past nine the next morning, the two girls in their cool cottons tripped off to the alfalfa field with Cecil Dodd. The plan was for them to be hard at work when the photographers arrived.

"I'll say they looked so cute I couldn't resist having their pictures, not for distribution, of course; just for my own collection."

Indeed, they looked so very cute that the Senator was seized with a desire to go along and Olympia had difficulty restraining him.

"You'd spoil the effect," she said irritably. "And besides you're supposed to be working on your statement to the press."

"Dave has it ready and mimeographed," he protested.

"Well, the least you can do is read the damn thing once and make sure you can pronounce the words," she snapped.

Martin had the hayrack fairly well filled before the young harvesters reached the field, but they fell to work at once,

the girls with rakes and Cecil Dodd with the fork. Martin got up to the driver's seat and took the lines. They were very merry about it and worked with laughing good will.

"If we rake faster than you can pitch, Cece," said Limpy, "you have to buy us an ice-cream soda."

"And take us to a movie!" added Adele.

"What happens if I out-pitch you?"

"We'll give you a doughnut and a glass of milk," promised Limpy.

"Two Maud Mullers on a summer's day," began Cecil.

" 'Twas campaign time to make hay, hay!" added Limpy.

"The judge was a chorus boy named Cece," Adele chimed promptly.

"The horses said, 'Excuse it, ple-ss (pless)!' "

"The Mauds were dolled up fine and fancy—"

"To rake in votes for Uncle Lancy," Cecil continued.

"And Martin said, 'All I can say,

" 'Is can the chatter and rake that hay!' "

They went into gales of laughter at their composition and Martin sniggered appreciatively on the driver's seat.

"Here come the photographers!" he warned them suddenly.

They fell to work again and the photographers snapped them from every possible angle. Then, when the rack was filled, the rakes and fork were tossed atop it, the girls were boosted up, Martin whipped the horses and they started homeward, Cecil walking behind with the photographers, grinding away at their machines. The girls did whatever was asked of them; they sat down; they sprawled; they stood up; they brandished the whip; they leaned on the rakes; they waved their hats.

"Stand up again! Come to the end for a close-up!" called one.

Limpy started.

Another photographer had run around in front to get a good view of the team and Martin. Suddenly the near horse got a glimpse of him in front of his blinder. The camera clicked. The horse shied. The wagon lurched. Limpy lost her balance, stumbled over the rake handle and was flung headlong from the rack.

"Limpy!"

Adele sat down and slid neatly off the stacked hay, landing on her feet, and dropped on her knees beside her sister. But Cecil Dodd was before her. He had Limpy in his arms.

"Limpy! Darling! . . . Darling! Are you hurt?"

"No," said Limpy irritably. "It would serve me right if I broke my neck. What do I think I am anyhow, some daring young man on a flying trapeze? Ouch!"

Cecil Dodd was white with rage. "Of all the damned idiotic fool nonsense—" he began passionately.

"Oh!" cried Limpy faintly. "Oh! I think I'm going to faint! Catch me, Cece."

Cecil caught her.

"Shut up, you silly dunce," she whispered. "The press'll hear you."

Limpy tried to rise, assisted by Cecil and Adele.

"Ouch! . . . Don't pull! . . . Ouch! I scratched myself!"

Martin, too, had swung down from the driver's seat. Now he raised his hands to his lips.

"Yoo—hoo—ah!" he bellowed. "Bill! Bring the wheelbarrow! Quick!"

Bill came running from the garden with the wheelbar-

row—which was hastily bedded with fresh-cut alfalfa and Limpy helped into it.

"Poor darling," said Adele. "Does it hurt much?"

"No," said Limpy crossly. "I'm just bruised in the pride! I'll be the laughing stock of Iowa. Falling off a hayrack!"

The cameras clicked again.

Olympia had been having worries of her own. Hilda—"dumb cluck"—had mistakenly shown the reporters to the Senator's study instead of escorting them to the side porch, which commanded a good view of the tables and chairs on the east lawn. The Senator had given them his message and settled down to answer their queries and expound the doctrines of the campaign instead of remarking, as he should have done, that he would "reserve his remarks till after lunch; come on down and have a doughnut."

Aunt Olympia tapped her foot impatiently; they were going to miss the haying. It was nearly twelve o'clock.

"Make hay while the Senator shines," she muttered irritably.

By the time the Senator got the reporters down to the veranda, the haymakers could be seen in the distance, wending their homeward way.

Olympia greeted them with a suavity she did not feel; she seldom did feel her suavity.

"You must excuse me," she said beaming rosily; "I've got to have lunch ready for those poor dears. . . . The children have been raking hay this morning. . . . Helen, dear, run tell Hilda to fry more doughnuts. . . . Surely you boys will have a doughnut with us and a glass of milk."

The reporters had no thought of anything else. Olympia led them out to the tables. The hayrack turned into the lane that led to the barn yard. Olympia gave it a very dirty look. She had told the girls to ride home. Her eyes swept beyond it to the trailing party. There came Adele and Cece and the photographers and Bill with a wheelbarrow; but no Limpy.

"Del!" she cried shrilly. "Something's happened! Limpy's gone!"

"Be calm, my dear," said the Senator, putting on his distance glasses. "Be calm. There she is. She's riding in the wheelbarrow."

Aunt Olympia collapsed upon a chair. She wiped her brow. "She's . . . she's so playful," she said bravely. "I thought maybe she had hurt herself."

"Adele's crying," said Helen suddenly. "Limpy's stretched out! She is hurt!"

"Del!" gasped Aunt Olympia. "Call a doctor! Do something! Something's happened!"

They ran to meet the wheelbarrow, the Senator, Aunt Olympia, Hilda and Helen, followed and presently passed by the reporters.

"Limpy!"

"Limpy, what happened?"

"I'm sleepy," said Limpy shamefacedly. "I'm taking a siesta!"

"She fell off the hayrack," said Adele. "I don't think she's much hurt, Helen. She stood up all right."

"Alençon Delaporte Slopshire!" began Aunt Olympia in a sort of tearful bellow. And then she stopped suddenly.

Not by any possible stretch of her imagination, though it was elastic to the roots, could she blame this on the Senator. This made it doubly hard to bear.

"What was Cece doing? Why didn't he prevent it?" she cried.

Cecil didn't answer. He didn't look at her. He stalked on toward the house, looking surly.

"I'll bet it was his fault!" said Aunt Olympia accusingly.

"No, it wasn't, darling," said Limpy. "He wasn't even on the hayrack. I stumbled and fell off and I'm not hurt a bit. I just caught a hitch-hike home."

"Put her to bed! Call a doctor! Where's that damned emergency kit?"

"Put me in the hammock and pass me a couple of doughnuts. Ouch!" said Limpy, rising from the wheelbarrow.

They held the hammock steady for her to lie down. Someone ran for doughnuts, for milk. Cecil Dodd stood grimly by with folded arms and said nothing.

But since it was apparent that Limpy was not ruined for life by the disaster, Aunt Olympia rallied. She had the tables moved over close to the hammock so Limpy could share the fun.

"Tell Hilda to fry more doughnuts," she ordered again and again. "Cece, what's the matter? You're not eating anything!"

"I'm not hungry," he said curtly.

"Don't you want a doughnut?"

"No."

"Don't you want a glass of milk?"

"No, I don't."

"He's got a sunstroke!" ejaculated Olympia. "Bring him a drink. Don't give him any ice water. Call a doctor, Del! Where's that damn kit?"

Cecil sat down with his back against a tree and held his knees between his arms. "I've not got a sunstroke; I'm not sick; I don't want anything. And if you want to know what's the matter, I'm mad! I'm mad through and through."

Olympia dropped the subject. She was an old campaigner. She knew enough not to fight things out in the presence of reporters. She fell to passing doughnuts with great vigor. The girls, she thought, must have said something to hurt his feelings.

When reporters and photographers had gone, Dave Cooper turned to Cecil.

"Well, come along, Cece. The Senator's going to get busy next week. We have to buzz off and get the works oiled."

"Buzz off!" ejaculated Cecil. "You mean go off—away from here—and leave them here alone? . . . I can't go! I daren't leave here! I'll resign!"

The family was speechless. Hilda stopped removing the dishes and glared at him. Dave lighted a cigarette.

"We can't go off and leave her with these—these—people," he substituted politely. He had started to say maniacs. "They'll kill her. They'll drown her in that damned pool or tie her in the attic and set fire to the house or throw her out some upstairs window or—"

"You silly dunce!" boomed Aunt Olympia, with tears in her eyes, her under-chin trembling ominously. "I suppose you think I pushed her off that hayrack!"

"No! I don't think you pushed her off! But I know who sent her up there!" he boomed back, accusingly.

"Del!" wailed Olympia. "He thinks—I'm going to—kill Limpy!"

The Senator rose to the appeal. "This was very unfortunate, Cecil," he said with senatorial dignity. "Most unfortunate. We must certainly be more careful in the future. But your work is laid out for you; you must go with Dave. You needn't worry about the children; I shall make it my business to look after them from this on. You go along now and get ready to go with Dave. I'll take care of the children."

Aunt Olympia had had a hard day and she was terribly upset about Limpy. And now, on top of everything else, this from the Senator! For five minutes after Cecil had gone she sat motionless in her chair, except for a rough swabbing at her under-chin. Then she spoke. Her voice was high and wavering.

"Meaning, I suppose," she faltered, "that you think you're a better mother than I am! And if that child dies I'm to blame for it!"

The Senator was so surprised he didn't know what she was talking about. He had meant only to stand by Olympia and silence Cecil.

"Cece was terribly upset, Auntie," said Adele. "I was, too. You can't imagine how it felt to stand there—and see Limpy pitching off, face downward—and nothing we could do about it. He was upset, that's all."

"Well, so am I upset!" said Aunt Olympia. "I don't know when I've been so upset!" She blinked hard to keep back the tears.

Limpy got quietly out of the hammock, not without some sharp twinges of pain, walked over to Aunt Olympia and sat down in her lap.

"Aw, Aunt Olympia," she said wheedlingly, "we had a swell time! We laughed and made up poetry—very good poetry, too!—and Cece owes us an ice-cream soda and what do you say we do the whole thing over tomorrow?"

Chapter VIII

In August, impelled by the Governor's aggressiveness, the Slopshire-for-Re-election campaign got under way. The old trailer, after standing outdoors three or four days to become plebeianly stained with dust and streaked with rain and dew, was packed for travel. The itinerary was planned to the ultimate minute. The sound truck was loaded with papers, files and books.

The girls enjoyed campaigning. Aunt Olympia hovered over them broodingly, her solicitude not entirely attributable to their value as campaign material. She saw to it—as far as she was able—that they had proper rest, regular meals, abundant exercise. She decreed—and saw that the decree was well publicized—that the place chosen for them to pitch camp each night should provide some recreation for the girls—tennis, horseback riding or swimming; "for the health of our children far transcends a senatorial campaign."

Olympia herself usually went about with a large sewing bag on her arm. In this she carried fresh handkerchiefs, cigarettes (for private use only), a make-up box, an impressive array of darning cottons, needles and threads (assembled by Hilda), and an old, worn-out pair of the Senator's socks, on which she darned photographically with amazing patience. The regular mending and laundry were sent back to Hilda at Shires—without benefit of

camera men. The girls were frequently photographed in the act of washing or ironing a set of napkins.

"Poor Adele is doing the laundry this morning," Aunt Olympia would say apologetically to the newsmen, leading them to the best view. "We ran short of linens."

"Auntie, Auntie," Limpy remonstrated confidentially, "you're forgetting you're Scotch. We're going to wear those napkins out if we keep on laundering them half a dozen times a day. Shouldn't we use them at least once, just to get our money's worth out of them?"

Invariably they returned to Shires for the Sabbath, to get a little rest and a few hot meals; and always to attend church, very much *en famille,* the Senator, Aunt Olympia and the three girls, the cynosure of all eyes. Even when Brother Wilkie, the Governor, reached Maysville in his Sabbath tour of pulpits, the Slopshires went to church. Their presence did not seem to disconcert the minister, but he kept his eyes for the most part on the front pew where the children sat with the beldame. Uncle Lancy rather ostentatiously put a five-dollar bill in the plate, but Olympia surreptitiously countered with a telephone slug.

But it was Aunt Olympia who invited him and his troupe to dinner. She did it with penetrating heartiness, too, as the members stood agape at the church door with Brother Wilkie shaking every hand.

"I want you and the children to come right up with us for Sunday dinner," she proclaimed clearly. "You may be our political opponent, Brother Wilkie, but in the house of God you are His minister. And our board, such as it is, is your board."

Len Hardesty, who was usually hard pressed about one

thing or another on Sunday morning, had also attended divine worship in Maysville that morning, occupying the corner of the pew directly opposite Senator Slopshire's and gazing uninterruptedly at Adele's slightly flushed profile during the entire service. He put nothing in the collection plate. Though Olympia had not definitely included him in her invitation, he tucked Adele cozily into his small roadster and arrived at Shires in advance of the main party.

"You may as well lay a place for me, too, Gustavus," he told Hilda cheerfully. "And don't put me next to the brats. . . . Can't they wait till the second table? Or how about serving Adele and me alone in the back yard?"

"It was shocking, Brick," Helen wrote. *"There we all sat, smiling, cooing and being polite. Brother Wilkie asked the blessing. Aunt Olympia, looking like an overgrown cherub with high blood pressure, gushed over the brats and we talked about the church and unanimously blamed the ills of the nation and the ills of the world on our spiritual decline, our falling away from the precepts of our fathers, our disregard of the holy Sabbath. And inside we were all roundly cursing each other, of course; and every word of the sermon had seethed with politics. Uncle Lancy was called from the table three times—more politics. And Len Hardesty took notes of Aunt Olympia's wise-cracks so he could use them himself. And then we all stood on the porch and waved good-by to them as they drove off, the children loaded down with apples and candy and cookies—but no salted nuts, because Uncle Lancy said they were Limpy's and hid the box."*

Even with the campaign well under way, they continued to see a good deal of Len Hardesty. "Too damn much," Aunt Olympia said expressively. He was constantly popping in on them unexpectedly, both when they were on the trail and when they were resting up at Shires. By seeming chance they ran into him at tourist camps, at beaches, fairgrounds and public parks. Even at the Senator's table, he kept his notebook beside his plate to jot down additional proofs of the Senator's inefficiency or Aunt Olympia's extravagance.

"Hum, squab, I see," he said one Sunday, making a note of it. "I'll have a larger portion, Senator, if you don't mind. . . . So it's squab, eh? . . . And the Governor and the brats and—worse luck, I!—dine on corned beef and cabbage."

"He does that to appeal to the slaughterhouse vote," said Olympia. "I'll bet he goes right upstairs afterward and fills up on caviar and truffles and French pastry."

"I notice that's a very expensive radio you've got rigged up in your trailer," Len went on. "We've only got a second-hand phonograph in the covered wagon to amuse the brats."

"We had to get a good one to follow the Governor's speeches," said Aunt Olympia. "He mouths his words so you can't understand him on anything less than the best."

"Not, I suppose, figuring that it also enables your pretty wards to amuse themselves dancing on the greensward to New York night-club music?"

"Well, what's wrong with dancing on the greensward? It's one of the most innocent and natural diversions. David did it!"

"Yes, but before the Lord; not before photographers and reporters," said Len.

"I'm not sure of that. There must have been reporters present. He's been getting publicity on it ever since, hasn't he?"

"And he certainly didn't do his dancing in the arms of a well-tailored lounge lizard," persisted Len.

"'*Honi soit qui mal y pense,*'" quoted Aunt Olympia airily.

"French, huh?" said Len Hardesty, making a note of it. "Alençon Delaporte must be giving you lessons."

"Del doesn't know a word of French, you worm, and you know it!"

"Some people say he can't even speak English," said Len.

"Certainly! Good plain old unvarnished American is good enough for Senator Slopshire. . . . Make a note of that, someone. . . . He says 'hornswaggled' and 'I swan,' and there's nothing English or French or aristocratic about hornswaggle and swan."

"Go on, Ollie, you forget who you're trying to kid! . . . Or would it be whom? . . . I've been a Sloppy hanger-on for ten years and I never heard him do any swanning. . . . However," he added thoughtfully, "I admit he's very apt to, come next November eight, when he's tuning up for his swan song."

During September, the congressional hearings on un-American and subversive activities almost took the limelight from the state campaigns. The Senator was almost childishly pro-American in his convictions, and followed the reports with morbid avidity. Some of his most ringing speeches were in hot defense of this suddenly jeopardized

Americanism and he received a very good press on it.

This obliged the Governor to follow the same tack, though he had no personal experience with subversive elements and thought them a good deal overrated. He had spoken in every Methodist church in the state and he hadn't seen any subversive activities going on. Still, since subversive elements were definitely not popular with the orthodox, he leaped gallantly to their denunciation.

One day the press reported that in the compulsory registration of foreign agents, some known to be engaged in such activities had not registered. Investigations were under way. The next morning headlines screamed the news that three well-known and popular Washington socialites had been arrested as spies. One of these was Gabriel d'Allotti.

That was exciting news for the orphans, and Adele and Limpy had great fun teasing Helen about it. Helen took it good-naturedly.

"No wonder he knew more about things than I do," she said cheerfully. "I'd know things too, if I were paid a salary for learning them. I'm afraid he wasn't the old palsy-walsy I thought him; he didn't tell me what he was finding out."

Even Aunt Olympia thought it was amusing. She said she wasn't at all surprised; she declared that half the ambassadors and all of the diplomats in Washington were spies. She said, "I give you my word, before I go to an embassy reception I take the safety pins out of the broken straps on my slip and have Hilda sew them on. I'm too proud to have foreign spies looking through me at those safety pins."

"It's a damned outrage," said the Senator, bristling all over with Americanism. "They ought to be shot."

"Not just for looking at a safety pin, Del, surely," said Aunt Olympia.

On the next Sunday Len Hardesty arrived at Shires, too late for church but in ample time for dinner.

"I'm supposed to be down in Washington touching the Committee for more funds," he explained cheerfully. "We're running short. In fact, we're low. We were reduced to hamburgers last night, though I see you have an abundance of fried chicken here. Farley must be doing all right by you."

"You'd better get along down to Washington," said Aunt Olympia, "or you'll be reduced to canned dog food. As I remember, it was one of your party who first suggested it to the public—and he from a state that houses one of the biggest dog-food factories in the country! Not that I charge collusion or even bribery."

"I called up about it this morning. That's why I didn't get here in time for church. Gosh, I sure hated to forego my morning worship. . . . How did it go? God and the Republicans hobnobbing as usual, I suppose, with the Democrats off in a cozy corner in Hell having a good time!"

"Poor God," said Aunt Olympia. "Politics certainly makes funny bedfellows."

When dinner was over the Senator begged to be excused; he had important work on hand. Aunt Olympia got up and walked off; she was going to take a nap, but whose business was it? Helen had letters to write and Limpy took the box of nuts and the funny papers and went out to the porch. Adele and Len Hardesty, thus consider-

ately left alone, wandered down through the garden and on out into the orchard where they selected a big apple tree, far removed from the house and sheltered by a hedge, and sat down.

For a long time they devoted themselves to the tender, personal things natural to a young couple very much in love, but eventually settled down to speak of other things, of politics, their daily activities, their hopes, their plans.

"Oh, Len!" Adele cried suddenly. "Wasn't it exciting about Gabriel d'Allotti?"

"Exciting! I don't see anything exciting about it, but that they didn't catch him months ago. Quote: 'The lousy worm.' End quote."

"But that he should turn out to be a spy! We never dreamed of such a thing! We've had no end of fun with Helen about it."

"With Helen?"

"Don't you remember? Gabriel d'Allotti was the man who spent all last spring studying the American system with Helen. I told you about it."

Len, who had just started to light a cigarette, paused suddenly, his hand in midair.

"The American system! With Helen," he repeated.

"Oh, it was perfectly all right," she said hastily. "There was nothing flirtatious about it. Helen is dead serious about being engaged to Brick, you know. . . . Sh! It's a surprise for Aunt Olympia. . . . Gabriel said he was gathering material for a book on the American picture and he got Helen to help him. Though she says he knew more about it than she did. They used to argue for hours about pacificism and armaments and military preparedness and

all that. Why, he even warned her against Canada—in an indirect way. We call her the First Assistant Spy."

Len lit his cigarette slowly. "Did she see much of him?"

"Oh, he was hardly ever out of our sight. He went every place we did—not with us! He just met us there by accident, the way you do. He came to the house three or four times a week, afternoons, mostly. She didn't go out with him; Brick wouldn't like that. He used to meet her in the gallery of the House. Limpy and I always wanted to be on the Senate side to watch Uncle Lancy, but Helen had to go to the House so she could get pointers for Brick. He would meet her there and then they'd argue about things."

"I see." Len stood up. "Well, beautiful, I've got to be a-flying myself down to Washington, so don't sit there blinking your lashes and looking lonesome, trying to get my mind off the salvation of the nation. According to the papers, Sloppy is taking a few days off to rest his corns. Will you be here the rest of the week?"

"Till Thursday. It isn't for Uncle Lancy's corns. It's so Hilda can get us mended and laundered and fed. It's terrible cooking in that trailer. We all have to work at once, you know, for the sake of the photos, and there's not room for three. Our digestions pay the penalty."

"I'll be over before Thursday. Thank Ollie for the chicken. . . . Hamburgers! . . . And to think if it hadn't been for the shortsightedness, the hopeless inefficiency of old Sloppy, I'd be with you on fried chicken instead of over there with the brats on hamburger."

Aunt Olympia, shrewd as she was, could not understand Cecil Dodd. In the beginning, though she had certainly made it clear that as assistant director of publicity he was

chiefly to take care of the woman angle, he had flung himself into the campaign with such assiduity that she could hardly get hold of him long enough to take the girls horseback riding. Dave Cooper assured her the kid was doing all right, that there was real stuff back of his gentle smile, but Aunt Olympia felt that her plan had been somewhat of a failure. Now suddenly all this was changed. Cecil had become ubiquitous, constantly underfoot, as Olympia complained. When Dave, who had come to rely on him, flatly ordered him off on certain missions, he went, but with reluctance.

"He's beginning to miss the sofas," said the Senator sympathetically. "That's the worst thing about cushions—they become habitual."

"Oh, I knew he couldn't keep it up," grumbled Aunt Olympia. "These fireworks that go off with the biggest explosion always sputter out first."

Still, Dave assured her, once he was dragged away from the insidious comforts of Shires or the clubby attractions of the trailer entourage, he worked both hard and well; "like a dog," Dave said; "and does what he's told."

On Saturday when the cavalcade returned to Shires for rest and renovation, Dave said he and Cece would go to town and do some intensive groundwork at Headquarters. Cece objected; objected gently, but firmly. He said he needed rest and renovation as much as anybody.

"Call up Headquarters and tell 'em we're coming," said Dave firmly. Aunt Olympia gave him his hat.

On Sunday, except for the visit of Len Hardesty, which they had come to expect, the day was restfully calm and quiet. And then, on Monday evening, as they were having

coffee in the cool of the east veranda, Hilda announced disapprovingly,

"It's Mr. Dodd on the 'phone and he wants Miss Limpy."

You could have knocked Aunt Olympia down with a feather. She said so herself, at least a hundred times in the days that followed. She couldn't open her mouth. She just sat, as if she had indeed been knocked there.

Limpy ran back from the telephone. "Oh, Aunt Olympia, Cece says the Young Democrats are getting up a dance rally at the Fire House and if he comes and gets me and drives carefully and brings me back early, may I go?"

Aunt Olympia, still suffering from the feather-blow, couldn't speak.

"Would you like to go, girls?" asked the Senator mildly.

"Did he invite all of us, Limpy?" asked Adele significantly.

"Um—ah—well—ah—perhaps not specifically. I'll go and ask him, shall I? He only mentioned me—a small party, I believe."

Aunt Olympia came to. "You can't go," she said in a strangled voice. "You can't go a step. And you needn't say 'Aw, Uncle Lancy,' for I'm running this nursery and you can't go."

"Maybe we could get Ben Baldy to drive them over, all of them, if they want to go," said Uncle Lancy helpfully.

"They can't go," said Aunt Olympia. "They've danced enough. They've got to dance Friday night and Saturday night and go to church Sunday and listen to you make three speeches and that's enough excitement for children. They can't go."

"Okay, Auntie. I didn't really care about it. I'll tell him."

"I'll fire that worm," said Aunt Olympia. "I knew there was a nigger in the woodpile."

"Be calm, my dear," said the Senator soothingly. "It was part of his job to help amuse the girls. That's what we hired him for."

"We didn't hire him to amuse Limpy. She's too young to be amused. You're amusing enough for a child that age. I wouldn't have believed it. You could knock me over with a feather."

"He says all right," announced Limpy. "He doesn't care about the dance. He says he'll come over and make a report to the Senator."

"You call him right up, Del, and tell him to stay where he is and not interrupt our rest with any reports. You tell him to stay where he is and do as Dave tells him. Here I am, just getting somewhere with my extemporaneous speech and now getting all upset about Limpy. . . . You call him right up, Del. Tell him when we want him we'll send for him." Aunt Olympia tried to still the under-chin with a few fierce jabs. "With a feather," she muttered feebly.

On Tuesday morning, a surprising announcement temporarily distracted her from her maternal anxiety. Every paper in the state announced that Governor Wilkie had suddenly decided the time was ripe for him to make the most important speech of the campaign over a nation-wide hook-up. He was quoted as saying that "certain dramatic developments in Washington had impelled him to alter his original schedule and since the revelations he was about

to make concerned not only their sovereign state but the entire nation, he had arranged for the national audience."

The family at Shires discussed it at length over their breakfast.

"It's a fake," said Aunt Olympia. "There's nothing more he can say. He's said everything already, and more, too."

"Maybe he has found some new words in the dictionary," said Adele.

"Do you suppose he'll pause for applause so the listening world can hear the brats wave lollypops?" wondered Limpy.

Before they left the table there was a call from Dave at Headquarters.

"See the papers, Senator?"

"Yes, what's up?"

"Nobody seems to know. But the reports are that their Headquarters are agog. They've hired a college professor to check the speech. Maybe we'd better come out and listen in with you so we can cock up an answer."

"Yes, do that. It's a good idea," said the Senator.

When he remarked mildly that the boys were coming out to listen in with them and help frame his reply, Aunt Olympia bounded clear out of her chair.

"You call him right back and tell him to leave Cece where he is!" she cried. "I can't listen to speeches and look at that worm in the same breath."

"Adele, that's the most perfectly mixed figure I ever heard in my life!" said Limpy admiringly. "It's triple! It's unique!"

Aunt Olympia didn't hear her.

"My dear," the Senator remonstrated, "we can't hurt

the boy's feelings. Dave says he's working like a dog and making a good job of it, too."

"Why shouldn't he? What is he, anyhow, but a dog, a yellow dog, too!" Aunt Olympia smiled ever so faintly in appreciation of herself. "I tell you what to say, Del. You tell Dave one of them had better stay there to get the general reaction to the Governor's drivel—and Cece can stay—and Dave can come."

That sounding reasonable, the Senator started for the telephone. "You needn't tell him it's my idea," said Olympia. "I'm willing you should take the credit."

Everybody at Shires listened in on the radio that night to the Governor's speech. Hilda had a radio in her bedroom. Martin had his in the tenant house. The chauffeur, Ben Baldy, sat in the car in the garage and used the auto radio. In the living room—when the Senator retired from political life, Olympia intended to call it the drawing room—assembled the family, two secretaries, a committee man and Dave Cooper. Cecil Dodd had been left, chafing, in town.

The Governor began his speech with dignified and disarming mildness. He explained that he had known the Senator for many years, as his pastor, his friend, and, more recently, as Governor of his state. He made it very clear that, knowing him thus intimately, he could not brand the Senator as a wicked man, a vicious man, or a traitorous man. He was merely a hopeless inefficient, a courteous, richly comfortable gentleman farmer; one who knew nothing of the insidious intricacies of statecraft; one who could be led as a lamb to the slaughter by those wiser, more subtle, more farseeing, than he. He said that

hitherto—"I say hitherto"—he repeated sonorously, the Senator had been saved from egregious and irreparable error by the firmly coercive hand of his party leaders.

Then his voice deepened to the tone he used in evangelistic meetings in retailing the horrors of Hell.

"I say 'hitherto.' I mean 'hitherto.' This time, lacking coercive guidance, he has fallen into error both egregious and irreparable. The Senator has denounced subversive, un-American activities. Orally, yes, he has denounced them. And in all fairness, my friends, I believe the Senator at heart is opposed to such activities. But, my friends, is the good Senator—and I believe him to be a good, if not a particularly intelligent, man—is the good Senator smart enough to recognize subversive activities when he meets them? When he encounters them in the luxurious drawing rooms, at the lavish banquet tables, of Washington? When he entertains them in his own home, introduces them to his own friends?

"It is this point on which we challenge the Senator! Who, during the last session of Congress, was one of the most constant and familiar visitants in the Senator's luxurious apartment in Washington? Who ate his food, drank his imported wine, danced with the women of his household? Who was their confidant?

"On this point I challenge the Senator! Last week three handsome, ingratiating, polished young foreigners were arrested in Washington as spies for foreign governments. They were educated men, of cultured tastes and training; they were well supplied with money; they wore correct clothes, did correct things, were gracious, suave and acceptable. They were spies. One of these men was Gabriel

d'Allotti. Today, Gabriel d'Allotti languishes in jail as a spy, while the Senator dines on squab and rich aspics in his stately mansion at Maysville, while campaigning for re-election to his high office.

"In Washington, this Gabriel d'Allotti was one of the most confidential intimates of the family in their Shoreham apartment. The Senator was a member of the powerful committee on armaments. He is now on the Committee on Naval Affairs that deals closely with matters of national defense. Gabriel d'Allotti is a spy. What is the connection between these two? Why did they so constantly dine and wine together?

"My friends, I do not suggest—nor do I believe—that my old friend the Senator would deliberately betray his country and sell its secrets to any foreign, inimical nation. I know the Senator; he is my friend. He is an innocent, trustful, unsuspecting gentleman farmer, but sadly lacking in political acumen and farsightedness. Are you to trust to handle the intricate problems of statecraft, to represent you in the Senate of the United States, a man who innocently, ingenuously—and most unwisely—receives as his intimate a common spy? On these points, I challenge the Senator! Good night, and thank you."

The Senator was a good deal surprised. Olympia, scarlet with rage, was at work on her under-chin. Adele and Limpy, who had become accustomed to charges and counter-charges and knew there was nothing in them, snickered a little. But Helen, who had turned dead white, twisted her slim hands nervously in her lap.

"Who's the wop? Ever hear of him?" asked Dave briskly.

"Why, the girls have been talking about him! Yes, I must have met him."

"He never had dinner at our house in his life! He just came to call," shouted Aunt Olympia.

"How'd he get in?" persisted Dave.

"I invited him," said Olympia angrily. "He asked for it and I invited him."

"Oh, Uncle Lancy, it's—all—my fault!" Helen stammered.

"Not at all, not at all, my dear," said the Senator soothingly. "Everybody goes everywhere in Washington. Anybody calls on anybody. There's no crime in that."

"He said he was—writing a book," said Helen weakly.

"Writing a book covers a multitude of spies," said Olympia.

"Uncle Lancy, I—feel just terribly," wailed Helen.

"Terribly, my dear? What nonsense! There's nothing to feel terribly about. It doesn't mean anything. He can't substantiate his charges. It's just another red herring he's got hold of. It doesn't mean a thing."

"Oh, yes, it does," said Olympia grimly. "It means that louse, Len Hardesty, is buckling down to business and we've got to mind our P's and Q's. He wrote that speech from beginning to end."

"Of course," said the Senator. "And Dave'll write me one tomorrow that will show them up in great shape. They can look at my record. I'm clean—on that score, anyhow. Everybody is entertained in Washington, and you can't go around at tea tables sorting sheep from goats. . . . Why, that fellow d'Allotti has even horned into the White House. Don't worry, my dear. Dave will take care of it."

Chapter IX

The girls, reassured by the Senator's unconcern, dismissed it from their minds, took magazines and candy and went to bed. Dave was not at all disturbed about it.

"We can laugh it off," he said cheerfully. "After all, they can't expect a senator to hire a bouncer for his tea table."

"Not on ten thousand a year anyhow!" said Olympia. "Though I've often wanted one. And it would be money better spent than most."

"Anybody who's been received at the White House, at Secretary Hull's, and at Secretary Roper's, particularly, is good enough for our constituents," said Dave. "I'll get along to town and get ready."

But a secretary was kept busy at the telephone until two o'clock in the morning answering the anxious queries that came in.

"Yes, the Senator heard the speech. No, he is not at all disturbed by it. Yes, of course, they've met d'Allotti. Everybody in Washington has met him. He's been at the White House time and again, and at the Hulls' and the Ropers' and all the best places. It's a frame-up. The Senator says it's a red herring."

During their days of rest between tours, the Senator and Aunt Olympia had their breakfast, along with the morning papers, served to them in bed. The Senator often received early reporters there too, but by eleven in the

morning they were dressed and downstairs, ready for the influx.

Hilda laid a table on the east porch for the girls and they straggled down whenever they felt inclined, being served as they came. Usually they sat for an hour or more, chatting, sipping coffee, discussing the things three sisters would discuss. Often before they had finished Aunt Olympia joined them for a final cup of coffee.

On Wednesday morning, after the Governor's speech, they had hardly started their breakfast when suddenly Aunt Olympia bounded onto the porch. She was in her dressing gown, very red of face, and had not taken time to remove the net from her permanent wave; nor to powder, although usually most punctilious about her appearance before the girls. The Senator, his bathrobe draped not too neatly about him, his thin hair standing up unbrushed on a very pink head, was close at her heels.

"Helen," she said abruptly, "what in the world did you tell that man?"

Helen looked mildly startled. "What man?"

Limpy spoke up quickly. "According to my English grammar, in which I was very good and never flunked, one can't just say 'that man'; one has to give him an antecedent."

"I'd like mighty well to know his antecedents," said Aunt Olympia. "It would be a dime thriller, at least."

"My dear, don't be abrupt," said the Senator placatingly. "Never be abrupt."

"What man, Aunt Olympia?" asked Helen.

Hilda came out with a fresh pot of coffee but Aunt Olympia waved her away with the armful of newspapers

she carried, which the girls had overlooked. She sat down at the table, heavily, shoving away the plates and silver, and laid the papers before her.

"That dastardly varmint, Gabriel d'Allotti."

"Now, my dear, be reasonable. Remember that every nation has spies. We have spies. Remember Nathan Hale. Remember. . . ."

"Remember fiddlesticks! If we have spies, why don't they ever find anything out? . . . And if we have got spies, they do their spying like gentlemen and don't go worming in on innocent young girls. . . . Maybe that's why they never find anything out," she admitted more moderately.

"Gabriel d'Allotti!" repeated Helen. "Why, I didn't tell him anything! He knew lots more than I did. I couldn't tell him anything. I don't know anything."

"There you see, my dear! Just as I said. She doesn't know anything," said the Senator triumphantly.

Aunt Olympia looked up from the papers. Her eyes went first to Limpy, then to Adele and then to Helen. The three of them sat like one piece of sculpture, white of face, wide-eyed, motionless. Tears came to Olympia's eyes. Better betray the nation (and let the army save it, she thought treacherously) than lose these girls.

"I didn't mean to startle you, Helen," she said cheerfully. "Del, ring for hot coffee. . . . It's nothing to worry about, girls. Limpy, you'd better eat your breakfast; your toast is getting cold. There's nothing to it, of course, Helen; we know that."

"What is it?" Helen asked, with white lips. "What has happened?"

"Oh, you know how those foreigners are! They love

the limelight, even when they're in jail. Not like us Americans who commit our crimes confidentially. . . . Fill their cups, Hilda! Del's, too. . . . You see, Helen, it seems he told the press that he got his information from you—"

"From me!"

"He did not!" cried Limpy passionately.

"Of course not, darling. But naturally the papers are making quite a splurge of it. They have your pictures and—quite a lot of dope about you, and about us, too, for that matter. They've even got some pictures of him juxtaposed among you; fakes, of course, but it gives the effect. He told the press it was you who told him about our national defenses."

"But I don't know a thing about our national defenses," cried Helen. "Except what I asked Uncle Lancy."

"I'd like to wring Len Hardesty's neck," said Aunt Olympia. "This is what I call a blow below the belt."

"Len Hardesty." Adele looked suddenly sick. "Aunt Olympia—do you think Len—did this—to my sister?"

"Oh, naturally," said Aunt Olympia philosophically. "That's his business. But he never seemed to notice Helen—he never paid any attention to her or what she was doing. I didn't suppose he even knew about it. Those lousy newspapermen! They know everything. Can't keep their minds on one girl—even a beauty—got to be nosing into everything!"

Adele stood up. She looked dazed. "I told him," she said faintly. "I told him Sunday. I thought it was—funny."

"You told him Sunday, Adele? . . . Oh, that's it, then! He cocked up that speech and sicked the A.P. onto us."

"But Aunt Olympia—would—he—do that?" Adele stammered. And her face was so white and anguished, her wide eyes had turned to such midnight darkness, that Aunt Olympia's heart went out to her.

"It's his job, my dear, and a job's a job."

Hilda appeared in the door. "It's Mr. Hardesty, looking like the wrath of God and if he didn't sleep in those clothes then I'm no laundress."

Adele started swiftly for the side door.

"Don't go, my dear," said the Senator gently. "It's always good politics to hear both sides."

Adele turned obediently and went to the window and stood with her back to the room, to the door Len Hardesty would enter, staring out into the garden with eyes that saw nothing. Helen and Limpy stood up, rigid, white of face, as Len Hardesty came in. Aunt Olympia poured herself a cup of coffee. The Senator patted his lips with a napkin, though he had eaten nothing.

"Hello, Len," he said. "Bring some hot coffee, Hilda. Sit down, Len."

"The wrath of God" well described him. He was pale. He had not shaved. His eyes were black and dark-circled. He glanced just once at Adele's slim back silhouetted against the windows.

"Well, there's the devil to pay now," he said dejectedly.

"Well, pay him!" said Olympia crisply. "You've got your fingers on his purse-strings, haven't you?"

"Oh, I'm paying and don't think I'm not," he said doggedly. "Senator, I—I give you my word, I never anticipated this."

"Was it a nightmare?" asked Aunt Olympia.

"Oh, I know I should have realized I was stirring up a hornet's nest, but we've been in such a damned hole over the whole mess—I just thought it would be one more jack-in-the-box from the bag of tricks."

"You wrote that speech, Len Hardesty, and don't you deny it."

"I don't deny it. And that's all I did do. I thought maybe it would stir up a little local fuss and maybe entice a few rabidly Americanistic partisans, and God knows we need them. I thought it would shut the Senator up on subversive activities, which the Governor doesn't know a tinker's damn about."

"If that's all you did, how about these papers?" demanded Aunt Olympia.

"The dirty skunk! d'Allotti, I mean. It suddenly dawned on him that if he could drag you into it, Senator, you'd get him out to clear your own skirts. Use your pull with the administration. He called the newsmen after I left. A pal down there tipped me off and I flew back down. I've worked like a devil on it but I couldn't stop it."

"You'd better have a drink, Len," said the Senator kindly. "You look all in. Ring, Ollie."

"Scotch and soda," he said briefly.

"You'd better have ham and eggs. Bring him some food, Hilda. After all, we can't starve snakes on our very doorstep. Give us a bad press."

"It's not irreparable, even yet, Senator," said Len Hardesty. "Now if you had a good publicity man—like me, for instance—"

"He's on his way out here, now," said the Senator. "Cece, too. We 'phoned him."

"He'll work out the details. And if he's good enough, he can even make capital of it. Of course, he'll get you a nation-wide hook-up to answer the charges. He will not let you make any statements until you have spoken straight to the nation. He will have you start off by saying that from the beginning of time it has been the practice of cowards and curs to hide behind the skirts of a woman—preferably, a young and pretty woman."

"Make a note of that, Limpy," said Aunt Olympia eagerly. "He's got something there."

"I can't," said Limpy hoarsely, between clenched teeth. "If I let go of myself I'll—go to pieces—and scream—and throw things—"

Aunt Olympia looked at her. "Don't you feel well, Limpy?" she wailed anxiously. "You—look—very—strange! You'd better take something. Call a doctor, Del! Do something. Can't you see the child's sick?"

"Sit down, kid," said Len Hardesty. "And let go! . . . Didn't I tell you in the beginning you had to learn to take it?" He put a chair behind her. "Just let go and sit down."

Limpy dropped into the chair. "I—could—kill you," she whispered.

"Yes, I suppose you could. Well, you don't feel as badly as I do. I'd better have another Scotch and soda, Gustavus."

"And if we've got any more ground glass you might put in a tablespoonful," said Aunt Olympia.

"Sure, bring it along. I'd like it. . . . Now, in the second place, after holding him up to public scorn for trying to ease out behind a petticoat, you will adroitly mention that

his purpose is to get you to use your influence to get him out of the jam."

"Get him out! I'd get him into the electric chair, if I could!"

"Work that in, in your own suave and diplomatic language. You will bring out that he was received at all the best houses in Washington, and if you meet a man at the home of the President or a cabinet member, you cannot very well ask if he is a spy. You'll use your record—which is okay, for I've been combing it myself. Of course, you can prove that Helen didn't show him any papers because you never took any home with you and they were locked up. This really should make a sort of martyr out of you and win you any number of votes. You know voters."

"But how about me?" asked Helen faintly. "What does it do to me, Len?"

Len looked at her. Helen looked more anguished, Aunt Olympia thought, than she had at the funeral so long ago.

"It's a tough break, Helen," he said. "You've just got to keep your head up and take it on the chin. He's using you as a cover-up and everybody will know it. You didn't tell him anything, and stick to it. You merely met him."

"She couldn't tell him anything confidential," said the Senator stoutly. "For I never told her anything. Most of it was so technical I didn't really understand it myself. I just believe we ought to have strong defense; and anything they said was for better defense, I was in favor of."

"Helen," said Len, diffidently, "do you mind—telling us about—the map you gave him?"

"Map! I never gave him a map!"

"She couldn't! I haven't got a map myself."

"He says you gave him a map of our national defenses."

"She never had a map!"

"He couldn't possibly mean that relief map of the United States, could he?—Don't you remember, Uncle Lancy? I asked you about it. He brought the map to show how vulnerable we are and I asked you."

"Was it your map, Helen?"

"No, he brought it. He marked all our vulnerable points with a red pencil. And I asked you, Uncle Lancy, and you said the Mexican border was defended, and the Atlantic seaboard had strings of defenses all across the country and that all the shipbuilding places were fortified, and Boston and Manhattan and Washington. Don't you remember? I marked them with a blue pencil."

"And you gave him the map?"

"No. After we had it marked, he rolled it up to take along and I said I wanted it to send—as a sort of souvenir. I kept it."

"Have you got it?"

"Yes. It's up in my desk."

"Will you get it?"

"Yes, of course."

Aunt Olympia turned to Limpy. "Do you feel better, darling? Do you want an aspirin?"

"No. I just want a good sharp stiletto with a poisoned point. Helen is so—good—"

"Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind," said Len moodily. "That's what I did."

"Well, experience is a good thing," said the Senator sympathetically. "I know I've learned a lot that way."

"Here is the map," said Helen. "See, Uncle Lancy?

Gabriel drew the blue lines to show where we are vulnerable. I didn't know anything about it myself and you told me about defending the shipyards and the cities and the harbors—"

The Senator examined the map with two pairs of glasses. "Dear me, Helen, you did a very bad job of it," he said reprovingly. "You must have those forts two hundred miles off. And those submarine bases—tch, tch, tch!"

"I didn't try to be accurate," said Helen. "I didn't know enough, in the first place. We weren't being technical about it. But when he was criticizing our unpreparedness, I just boastfully drew red lines around every city I could think of."

"Is anything of secret nature indicated on this map?" asked Len.

"Lord, no," said the Senator with unwonted profanity. "There's not only nothing secret; there's nothing right. I'm afraid I didn't make myself very clear, Helen."

"Yes, you did, Uncle Lancy; but you weren't trying to be explicit and I didn't think it made any difference whether I put the red marks north or south, or even if I missed the town entirely; we were laughing; it was just a joke—then!" she added, pathetically.

"You can give photostatic copies of this map to the press," suggested Len Hardesty. "Not till after your speech. That's the highlight. And rest assured, the nation'll be on the air, from White House down to white wings. . . . It's more easily reparable for you—than for me," he said with another glance at Adele's silhouette before the window. "Well, I'll be getting along, Senator. I'm sorry. We're reduced to snatching at straws; I thought this was a

straw and snatched at it; I didn't realize it was tied to dynamite."

The Senator held out his hand. "Good-by, Len. It was a bad break. You look thin. Doesn't Brother Wilkie see that you get your three squares a day?"

"You look terrible," said Aunt Olympia cheerfully. "When Hilda says you look like the wrath of God, you can rest assured you look pretty bad."

"You're a couple of swell sports," he said moodily. "You've ruined the whole campaign for me. Remember how I used to love campaigns? Not any more! Politics is hell."

Chapter X

It seemed to Aunt Olympia that she had been called upon that day to endure more than could reasonably be expected even of a president's wife. But the day was not over. She had no more than seen them all comfortably relaxed and settled down when Dave Cooper arrived with Cecil Dodd. Dave looked disconcerted, almost disheveled. Before he could say a word, Cecil Dodd crossed debonairely to Limpy's chair, smiling, and said,

"Hello, Limpy! I brought you a present!"

Aunt Olympia's backbone stiffened starchily.

"A present for me, Cece? How nice!" said Limpy.

"Limpy's too young to be receiving presents," interrupted Aunt Olympia. "She's not of age yet."

"She's not too young to be receiving this," said Cecil Dodd. "This is a political present. Any Slopshire-for-Senator fan can receive political presents. Look, Limpy. It's a little Slopshire pin. I had it made to order."

"Let me see that pin!" said Olympia angrily. "What does it say on there? That doesn't look like Vote-for-Slopshire to me!"

"Oh, there wasn't room for all that!" explained Cecil Dodd. "I had to cut it down to Slopshire, or it wouldn't go on. And I didn't think enamel would look good on platinum, so I just had it engraved."

"Look at this, Del," said Olympia. "If those are dia-

monds around the edge of it, Limpy can't have it till I pry them out."

"Aw, Uncle Lancy!" wailed Limpy.

The Senator put on his glasses. "They don't look like diamonds to me," he said firmly.

"They're brilliants," said Cecil hastily.

"Certainly," said the Senator. "I could see that. And if they are diamonds, they're only chip diamonds. Cece says they're brilliants."

"Well, what's a diamond but a brilliant?" demanded Aunt Olympia.

"Rhinestones are brilliants," said Adele helpfully.

"Sure! Brilliant rhinestones!" corroborated Cecil Dodd.

"Del Slopshire—"

"Uncle Lancy!" from Limpy.

"I feel very much honored to have little Limpy flashing through the campaign in a Slopshire pin," said the Senator determinedly.

"Sure! Let me pin it on your shoulder, Limpy!"

Before the rapt eyes of the rest of the family, the outraged ones of Aunt Olympia, with Limpy smiling pleased approval, Cecil Dodd deftly attached the tiny pin to the shoulder of her frock and smiled down into her face.

"Lord, it's been lonesome," he said devoutly. "I thought we'd never get back."

"Lonesome!" boomed Aunt Olympia irritably. "Lonesome in the thick of a political campaign? Lonesome while the Senator is being accused of high treason and likely to be knifed at the polls if not strung from a gibbet? Of all times and places to be lonesome, that beats anything I ever heard!"

"I hope you didn't have a good time while I was gone," said Cecil.

Limpy was slightly disconcerted. "A good time? Oh—I can't remember exactly what we did. . . . I know we had a lot of trouble. . . . No, we didn't have a good time at all, Cece."

"Put him to work," said Olympia, waving the Senator to take him away. "And if he's got money to go around buying platinum pins and—brilliants—we can cut down on our expenses by reducing his salary. . . . Damn Len Hardesty, anyhow!"

The Senator had no trouble taking care of the spy challenge. There was no one, either Democrat or Republican, who could seriously push the charge, for Gabriel d'Allotti had been received everywhere. The Senator did not stop with citing his record, virtually from the cradle to the trailer of '38, with documentary evidence to support his claims. He went further. He demanded a complete, inquisitorial investigation of the entire case, and wrote the Department of Justice offering himself to be a witness, along with every other member of his household from Hilda up.

The Opposition was obliged to drop the issue, but their fingers were already slightly burned. As for Helen, there was no more pleasure in the campaign for her. She had become terrified of the whole business. She wrote frantically to Brick imploring him to withdraw from the rotten mess before it was too late. And she was not greatly reassured by his loyal declaration that she had nothing to fear: they didn't play politics that way in Iowa.

The campaign was spoiled for Adele, too. She wrote Len Hardesty a brief note.

"I can't see you or speak to you again, Len, until it is all over. I try not to think of you, but that is too hard. When it is over, if you feel the same, we will try to talk it through and see where we stand. But I simply can't see you. I couldn't draw a free breath in your presence until Uncle Lancy has either won or been defeated."

Aunt Olympia remonstrated with her, reminding her that this was Len's job and he had to do the best he could; reminded her, too, that his contract with the Governor would be up this year, and the Senator could use him in '44. Adele was gently obdurate.

Len wrote to her and she read the letters again and again, and kept them, but she made no answer. When he saw any member of the household, or when he called over the telephone to get news of them, he had one invariable message for Adele:

"Tell her it's nearly over, and I feel the same."

When the message was passed on to Adele, tears came to her eyes and she got up and left the room. But she did not weaken.

Aunt Olympia was none too happy, either. She couldn't turn her usual robust enthusiasm into the campaign because she had to watch Limpy; rather, she had to watch Cecil Dodd. It seemed to her as a simple act of loyalty he might have postponed his admiration until after the election. She even suspected, bitterly, that he was working for the Oppo-

sition; it would be like Len Hardesty to bribe him to do this just to get her mind off the campaign.

"Do you like that creature, Limpy?" she asked hopefully.

"Oh, sure, I like him. He's all right. Yes, I like him."

"I mean, do you like him better than anybody else?" persisted Aunt Olympia.

"Oh, no, of course not! I like Helen and Adele and you and Uncle Lancy best; and I like our grocery man back home and I'll like Len Hardesty again as soon as Adele gets over being mad at him. I like Dave and Martin and Hilda and I don't really mind Brother Wilkie, though I don't care much for the brats."

The casualness of this rather relieved Aunt Olympia. After all, it could not be very serious so long as Limpy's affections were widely disseminated. Still, she knew men. And that gentle, soft-voiced type—as she knew from the Senator—was the most obdurate when it made up its mind. If Cecil Dodd had made up his mind to think of Limpy, he was going to think of her. It was a cursed bad break for Aunt Olympia, because getting him was her idea. But she had hired him only to amuse Adele and particularly to make Len Hardesty jealous and give him a bad summer. This generation was certainly going to the dogs! There was the angelic Helen, not only mixed up with a delivery boy, but involved with a spy; there was the beauteous Adele stubbornly banishing a good newspaperman like Len Hardesty when he was only doing his job as he saw it; and now here was that child, that infant, Limpy, eating pecans and being cradle-snatched right under her eyes.

The girls teased Limpy, who, after the first flush of confusion, rather enjoyed it.

"I can't understand why you should be surprised," she said loftily. "I had admirers at home, didn't I? Who got Carl Walker to sing in the choir—best tenor we ever had? You'd think I was some beldame hobbling around on a tin trumpet."

When Aunt Olympia couldn't stand it another minute she asked the girls confidentially to drop the subject. "For Limpy's own good," she assured them. "I don't want her to get her mind set on him."

"She's used to being teased," the girls told her. "We all are. Teasing doesn't mean a thing to us."

"But if we keep dangling him before her eyes she may get to thinking of him," pleaded Aunt Olympia. "Besides, it upsets me. If we don't get rid of that damned button I'm apt to go straight to the polls and vote for Brother Wilkie."

The girls considerately dropped the subject. But there was no dropping Cecil Dodd. As the campaign grew hotter, it was inevitable that he should be with them almost constantly. And even when Aunt Olympia did connive to send him off on quite distant missions, he returned so soon—with favorable reports of his activities—that Aunt Olympia swore he had just hidden behind a tree for five or ten minutes.

If she could have concentrated all her forces on the case, and they were great, Aunt Olympia believed she could have handled it. But she was constantly being caught up in some maelstrom that required her personal attention. This was what made it hard.

During September there was a succession of deluging rains, but the campaign had to go on. She bought raincoats with matching umbrellas and galoshes for the girls and made them drink hot lemonade every night. Even in raincoats, they photographed well. She bought aspirin for the Senator—who believed in it—by the dozen boxes.

When at last it appeared that the sun was to shine again they took the trail back to Shires, to get their clothes and bedding thoroughly dried out and laundered.

"There's no place like home to dry out," she remarked contentedly.

"Did you say dry out or dry up?" asked Limpy.

Aunt Olympia laughed good-naturedly. "No hope of drying up till the election," she said. "We're lucky even to get dried out."

On the next morning, a committee representing the United Ladies' Aid Societies of the entire state called on the Senator with a petition. They demanded that he make an open declaration as to where he stood on prohibition. Brother Wilkie had come out flat-footedly for the repeal of repeal, and it was their duty as Christian women, wives and mothers, to ascertain the Senator's position.

Aunt Olympia received the petition and promised to call it to the Senator's attention at once.

"I'm sorry it quit raining," she said to the girls bitterly. "They're so dry they'd melt away like dust in a good rainstorm. No moderation, that's the trouble with the temperance crowd. Even the weather's not temperate. First it's a deluge and then it's a drought of prohibition."

"He'll have to say something," said Helen. "I'm an old Aider myself, you know, and we're just rabid on Prohibi-

tion. And you take us and the W.C.T.U. together and we're quite a crowd."

"Oh, he'll make them a speech," said Aunt Olympia. "He's a good churchman, they know that. I could write his speech myself."

"But what in the world can he say, Aunt Olympia? Brother Wilkie doesn't drink and doesn't serve liquor. It's easy for him."

"It's easy for the Senator, too. You can say just as much beating around the bush as you can face to face."

"Perhaps he'd better ignore it."

"Oh, no! Nothing makes women so mad as being ignored. They'd never forgive him for that. He won't have to say much. It's what he doesn't say will turn the trick."

The Senator answered the petition over the radio, on Wednesday, after prayer meeting, it being well publicized that he did not wish his talk to interfere with church services. The microphone was set up in his cozy library and there were photographers present to get pictures of him with his wife and pretty nieces grouped about him; even Hilda was brought into the picture, sitting dourly in the rear to hear his message on temperance and morals. They had the room well set for those pictures, carefully removing the siphon and the tray of glasses, even taking away the girls' lemonade, since lemonade photographs like a Tom Collins. Aunt Olympia extinguished her cigarette, too, and Hilda hid the ash trays.

The Senator addressed himself to his brothers and sisters of the churches of their beloved and sovereign state. He called detailed and statistical attention to his record as a churchman, going back to his childhood when he had

signed the pledge at his mother's knee; he referred them to his public speeches, his published articles and interviews, his vote record in the Senate, as proof of his loyal and wholehearted support of any movement, from the greatest to the least, that would tend to make ours the most temperate, most law-abiding, most Christian nation in the world.

"I have ever been found," he declared ringingly, "and will ever be found in future, in the front ranks of that great army waging unceasing war against intemperance. It is only through temperance that we can safeguard our homes, protect our innocent children. I solemnly pledge myself to do in future as I have in the past: to vote, to labor and to pray for increasingly stricter enforcement of any and all regulations designed to curb and control that rampant monster, Demon Rum; and for the total elimination of those cesspools of vice and iniquity which, alas, too often follow in its wake.

"My Brothers and Sisters of the Church, I must, in answer to inquiries, go specifically on record on another point. It is true, as quoted, that I have been closely identified with many church and religious organizations; I have held church offices; I have served as a delegate to church conferences, have spoken at their clubs and conventions. I have done this as an act of service to my fellow men and to my Maker. I have never been paid for my service to the church, nor received one penny from it even for expenses. I have paid my own expenses. For thirty years I have been a regular contributor to all church activities, both at home and abroad.

"I take no credit for any of this. I have done it as a matter of Christian duty and civic pride. I believe in the

church. I believe in its activities and respect its ideals. I am happy to contribute in my small way to its maintenance. But there have been rumors spread—and rumors do not arise without instigation—that I have received a price for my services, and that I utilize my religious connections for political advancement. I declare—nay, I take public oath—that such a statement is a deliberate and despicable falsehood.

"From the church I receive spiritual assistance only; and in return, I deem it a privilege to give what I can of my material substance and my practical service. I have never made money out of the church; I do not resort to the church for aid in political propaganda. To me, it is sacredly reserved for worship. My affiliation with it is spiritual, not political."

Aunt Olympia purred contentedly. "I'd like to see Len Hardesty's face now," she said.

"It will hold all but the fanatics," said Dave critically. "And there's no holding them anyhow."

"Well, I know one thing," said Aunt Olympia: "if the state Aids come out publicly and endorse the Governor, I'll drop a lighted cigarette on that carpet they held me up for. . . . Exclusive of refreshments."

Brother Wilkie was making open and flagrant appeal for the church vote, regardless of party affiliation. Getting into his stride, he no longer limited himself to occupying pulpits as a guest preacher on Sunday mornings. He went to prayer meeting; visited missionary societies; attended church picnics and chicken suppers and ice cream festivals; he was even introduced for a few remarks at Sunday Schools (the teachers and Bible Classes being old enough

to vote, and the youngsters apt to carry his message home, as he invariably suggested). His slogan had become: CHRISTIANS TO CONTROL AMERICA.

"You'd think Del was some sort of a heathen," said Aunt Olympia. "And I'm not sure but in some ways he is," she added thoughtfully. "Seems to me even a heathen would have the guts to speak to that worm about his conduct."

"My dear," remonstrated the Senator, "that is one thing that can't be done in any sort of political circles—even Republican."

"What can't be done?"

"Speaking to your opponent about his conduct."

"Who's talking about your opponent? I'm talking about Cece Dodd. I want you to tell him to keep away from here. I've got trouble enough."

"My dear, he was supposed to stay with us. That's what you hired him for, wasn't it?"

"Well, I didn't hire him to go calf-eyed over Limpy. Damn men, anyhow! You tell him to quit looking at Limpy. Every time I glance up I see him looking at Limpy. It's getting on my nerves. You tell him to stop it."

"My dear," he said in a pained voice, "I can't do that. He isn't a boy, you know. He's doing a good job. You can't tell a man what he's to look at, even if he's working for you. They'd have me up before Wages and Hours in no time."

"Do you see any sense paying a man wages to spend his hours looking at—at an—infant? Is that what the N.L.R.B. stands for?"

"My dear, you're making too much of this. Limpy is

only a child. And a nice child. I like to look at her myself. She's a mere child."

"You silly dunce! Don't you know children aren't what they used to be? They don't wait these days to put their hair down and their skirts up—I mean the other way round—to be grown up. Children are women now—and in the market, too—before they've entirely laid off diapers."

Thus frustrated on every hand, Olympia conceived the notion of dropping a few delicate hints herself. She couldn't come right out in the open about it, because she realized that even if Limpy herself felt no personal interest in Cecil, she did enjoy being admired, and open opposition would arouse her and her sisters with her to her own defense. So Olympia decided to be diplomatic.

"Well, Cece," she began pleasantly, when she finally cornered him alone, "what do you think of our girls?"

"I think they're lovely," he said, with a warm smile; maudlin, Olympia called it. "Just lovely, in fact. When I think of poor Len stuck with those brats, I think I struck it pretty lucky."

Olympia ground her teeth, but silently.

"Isn't Adele beautiful?" she asked, leading him on.

"They all are," he said generously. "Every one of them."

"Adele's the most beautiful and you can't deny it," she persisted, doggedly.

"I don't agree with you." He lighted a cigarette, looking worldly and sophisticated. "Beauty, you know, is entirely a matter of taste."

"It is not!" she said rudely. "It's a matter of complexion and features and hair. And it may interest you to know

that all real authorities on beauty—artists and sculptors and—real authorities—say Adele is far and away the most beautiful."

"Oh, perhaps, from their point of view," he conceded. "Personally, I don't agree with them."

"Well, what's wrong with her looks, you silly dunce?" she demanded irritably.

"Nothing. Nothing's wrong with them. Her looks are lovely. But in my opinion, her kind of beauty is—well, it's not natural. It's not spontaneous. It looks artificial, almost theatrical."

Aunt Olympia could hardly believe her ears. She was speechless.

"Now, you take beauty—well, like Limpy's for instance," he said, warming to his subject. "Now Limpy's beauty is honest and clean-cut and straightforward. There's nothing stagy about it. It's just plain, unvarnished, straight-to-the-heart beauty."

"Adele's not varnished, either," she said feebly. "I've seen her come straight from her bath. I've watched her make up. I know what I'm talking about."

"Oh, probably not," he said indifferently, "But the effect is the same. It looks made-up. Limpy's different."

"Do you realize," began Olympia, half-choking, "that Limpy is—is—a perfect—infant? A mere child?"

"To a man of my age and—general experience," he said gently, "there is nothing in the world so beautiful as a brave, glowing little bud just blossoming out to—" he caught himself quickly—"to the sun," he finished.

Aunt Olympia got up and walked straight out of the

room. She had to. She was afraid if she remained she would choke him with her bare hands and that would end the campaign in a hurry.

"It'll probably end up by my doing it anyhow," she told the Senator savagely. "But I'm making every effort to wait till after the election."

"You can't really blame him, my dear, for liking the child's looks," he argued mildly. "Everybody likes her looks. You know, Ollie, to tell the truth," he continued hesitantly, "I like her looks better than Adele's myself."

Olympia groaned. That was the gall and wormwood of it. She did, too.

Her distress was so great that the Senator decided to speak to Cecil himself, without telling her anything about it; for the Senator was devoted to Olympia and would humiliate himself to almost any depth to spare her distress. He had Cecil sent up to his library and closed the door.

"See here, Cecil," he began, matter-of-factly; "I want you to stop flirting with Limpy."

Cecil rose right up out of his chair to answer that. "Flirting with Limpy, sir! I'm not flirting with Limpy!"

"You're not! You're not flirting with Limpy? . . . Well, what do you call it?"

"I don't call it anything, sir. But I know it isn't flirting. I'm crazy about Limpy."

"Well, stop it! Her aunt and I will positively not permit anybody to be crazy about Limpy until—after the election."

"I wouldn't dream of flirting with Limpy," said Cecil, aggrievedly. "Any time. The election has nothing to do with it."

"Well, you've got her aunt all upset about it and we can't worry about Limpy and win an election at the same time."

"But what have I done, Senator? I've been very careful. . . . I only gave her that pin—and everybody wears Sloppy pins. . . . And Mrs. Slopshire asked me to be nice to the girls."

"To the girls, yes. Not to Limpy. Just to Helen and Adele. They're as good as married anyhow. Not Limpy."

"You know, Senator," Cecil confessed shyly, "I could get married myself if—she was old enough. With my political experience in this campaign I'm sure to land a good job somewhere. And I've got money enough to take care of a wi— a woman. I could do a lot better for a girl than Len Hardesty."

The bald effrontery of this staggered the Senator. Why, he and Olympia were counting on Limpy for at least ten years to come! When he rallied slightly he said gravely,

"Cecil, I'm in earnest about this. You've got to leave Limpy alone or—I will simply have to ask you to resign from our service."

That disconcerted Cecil. He thought it over, carefully. "Of course, if you fired me," he admitted, "it would hurt me in getting another job. But it wouldn't keep me away from Limpy. This is an election year. Anybody can follow a senatorial trailer, you know."

The Senator knew that, all too well. "I don't want to dismiss you, Cece," he said kindly. "You've done a good job and we like you. But Limpy is too young to know her own mind and we're not going to have her bothered."

"I didn't even think of proposing to her, Senator; not yet. I know she's very young, though mature for her years."

"What do you mean, mature for her years?" demanded the Senator, with some heat. "Why, she doesn't even know what a logarithm is."

"Who does?" asked Cecil gently. This was an embarrassing question.

"Anyhow, Cece, that is where we stand. You can take it or leave it."

"I'm going to take it, of course. Until the campaign's over. But I've been very careful, Senator. What have I done that I shouldn't do?"

"Well, you've upset Mrs. Slopshire. You can stop that. You must quit sitting around looking at Limpy."

"But Senator, you can't help looking at Limpy if she's in the room. It's a physical impossibility."

"Len Hardesty didn't look at her, did he?"

"Let me catch him looking at her!" said Cecil passionately.

"You've got to stop looking at her," said the Senator firmly.

"But Senator, you must realize—there's no place else to look when Limpy's there," remonstrated Cecil desperately.

"I'm sorry, Cece, but you've got to stop it. Pay attention to your work. And when you are discussing the campaign with us, you needn't address your remarks to Limpy. She's not running for office and I am."

"I'll try, Senator," he said unhappily. "I don't want to upset Mrs. Slopshire and I do want the campaign to go

through all right. But Senator, you must see how impossible it is to look at anybody else when Limpy's in the room."

"I'll keep her out of the room as much as I can," promised the Senator, kindly. "You keep your eyes glued to Mrs. Slopshire. Discretion is the best policy—at your age. When you get to be my age, a glance or two at Limpy won't hurt you. It'll even set you up a little. But for the time being, you stick to Mrs. Slopshire."

Chapter XI

Cecil tried hard. He dogged Mrs. Slopshire's steps so persistently, gazed into her eyes so steadfastly and with such melancholy wistfulness, that it got on her nerves.

"Well, what are you looking at?" she demanded tartly one day.

"Nothing," he said honestly.

When Aunt Olympia was not around to be upset by it, the girls still teased Limpy.

"You aren't as good as you thought you were, Limpy," Helen said. "You see Aunt Olympia has cut you out."

"Take it from me, Limpy," said Adele. "You've got to fight for your man these days. Fight to get him and fight to keep him; especially with vampires like Aunt Olympia around."

"There's something rotten in Shires," said Limpy, musingly. "I just can't believe my charms have palled on him so soon. . . . I wouldn't have believed this of Aunt Olympia. I'm going to take lessons." She dragged down her left eyelid, dabbed at her under-chin, breathed gustily a time or two. "Does it make me more ravishing?" she demanded.

But with girls running all over the place, it was inevitable that Cecil should get a few minor breaks. On one day by rare good chance, or possibly by design, he found Limpy alone in the sitting room. He glanced swiftly about the room. Yes, alone!

"Don't move, Limpy!" he whispered hoarsely. "Stay where you are."

"Is there a tiger ready to spring?" she asked.

"No, it's a mirror. I get a lovely view of you."

Limpy laughed. "Dear me, I'm glad I mirror well. But what's wrong with me in person?"

"Nothing!" he said fervently. "Nothing at all. You see, I'm not to look at you any more till after the election."

Limpy's glow of delight would have put her rosy aunt to shame. "No, really, Cece! How lovely!" she cooed. She held out her hand. "Was anything said about touching me?"

He grabbed the small hand and kissed it again and again, until Limpy became restive and tried to withdraw it.

"Nothing was said," he admitted reluctantly. "But I feel pretty sure it was included."

"Aren't campaigns fun, Cece? . . . Run, Cece! I hear footsteps."

Even with Aunt Olympia present and watchful, Cecil managed to make a few opportunities. He appeared at the trailer one day with an old-fashioned tripod and a kodak curtain. He said the papers complained that the last pictures of the girls hadn't been clearly focused; they wanted new pictures, better pictures. So he rigged up the tripod, posed the girls to his satisfaction, and then spent ten minutes under the curtain, working, as he said, on the focus. There was nothing Aunt Olympia could do about that, though she realized that behind that hot felt cloth he was feasting his hungry eyes on Limpy. Limpy knew it, too, and blushed prettily.

"Now just look at all these late pictures," Olympia com-

plained to the Senator. "Limpy, Limpy, Limpy! Always in the foreground, always in the best focus. Adele's got the looks that should be featured. No! Adele and Helen are reduced to background for Limpy's pictures."

"But she's so little," remonstrated the Senator. "If she isn't in front, she doesn't show at all."

"Don't worry. She's always in front and always shows. Well, I know one thing. As soon as this campaign is over, you and the Senate can go to the Devil. I'm going to take Limpy to Africa."

"Figuring I suppose that you can win me the colored vote when I run for president," he said.

Aunt Olympia, who did not care for the Senator's humor, ignored it as usual.

"I only wish they still had that woman's country with all the men in chains! The Amazons, wasn't it? Well, it was a great mistake to let it go out of circulation. I'd take Limpy there and live happily forever after."

"Limpy isn't the build for an Amazon," he objected.

"Well, I am. I'm Amazonian enough for both of us. . . . Thank God, it's nearly over. As soon as you're elected—though with this viper staring me out of countenance I daresay you'll go down to defeat; but if you're elected I want you to use your influence with the War Department and send him to the front-line trenches."

"But there isn't any war," he said.

"Well, start one. And I used to think it was wicked of David to send that guy Uriah into the thick of the fray to get rid of him!"

"But his motive was different; quite the opposite, in fact."

"Well, it's a good idea. I'm converted to it. Anybody you want to get rid of, send him to war. And if there isn't a war, start one. Anyhow, he's converted me from pacificism. Bigger and better wars, is my slogan from this on."

"Don't mention it till after the election," he said good-naturedly, hoping to humor her out of her ill temper.

During the first week of October, the trailer entourage established Baystown as headquarters and were giving parking facilities in the Community Center. From this base, the campaigners went off daily on flying junkets by automobile with a noisy escort of police. It had been a hard week, for this was the beginning of the Senator's state-wide sweep for votes.

On Saturday, Aunt Olympia exhibited a degree of nervous energy for which not even the hard week could be held entirely accountable. She spent the morning relaxing in bed and studying manuscript. She spent the afternoon having a facial, a wave, a mud pack and a hot bath. The Senator had gone off with Dave and Cecil to attend a picnic of the Young Democrats at Hardcastle, planning to return to Baystown in time to address the big rally in the Auditorium at eight o'clock.

He had wanted to take the girls along, but Aunt Olympia had put her foot down on that. "No, I want them to get rested up so they'll be pretty and fresh tonight," she said. "And if Limpy were off with you and Cece I wouldn't be able to concentrate. You go, and keep your eye on Cece. If he gets back here ahead of you, I'll have him arrested."

Aunt Olympia made the girls take a brisk walk. She had tea and sandwiches ready for their refreshment on their return.

"I want you to wear your prettiest frocks tonight and look your sweetest."

"Our wind-up costumes?" asked Limpy eagerly, for those fetching gowns had been kept under lock and key all summer.

"No; not those. The next-to-prettiest."

"Is this a special meeting, Auntie?" asked Adele.

"Well, it's apt to be," admitted Aunt Olympia nervously. "And it's my policy to be prepared for anything. You see—very possibly—this may be the night the Senator will be late and they'll call on me for my extemporaneous speech. That's why I ordered these little corsages for all of us. Rosebuds. I prefer orchids but they look too expensive for a campaigner."

"But why do we have to wear corsages and look nicer than usual? They won't call on *us,* will they?"

"Oh, no, dears, of course not. But you will have to sit on the platform and look nice and take a bow or two."

"But we always do that!"

"Yes, but when I make my extemporaneous speech we always have extra photographers on hand. . . . 'Ladies and gentlemen,' " she murmured, working on her chin and smiling urbanely.

At six o'clock, groups began streaming into the park. Microphones had been set up all over the grounds, so that those unable to crowd into the auditorium might hear. At seven, floodlights were turned on, and the band struck up.

"We'd better dress now," said Aunt Olympia.

"It's very crowded for four to dress in here," objected Adele. "Can't we take our bags and dash over to the hotel?"

"No. It's more effective for them to summon us from

the trailer; in case they call on us, of course. You'd better take the full-length mirror, Adele. It doesn't make so much difference about the rest of us."

Aunt Olympia's words were prophetic. At eight o'clock, after preliminary speeches and introductions, Jim Allen, the state chairman, shouted into the microphone:

"Attention, attention, attention! Ladies and gentlemen! We have just received word that our good friend, Senator Slopshire, has been unavoidably detained at Hardcastle. He will not waste a moment getting here, but in the meantime, out here in the trailer just finishing their quiet supper, we have that grand old trouper, Olympia Slopshire, the Senator's wife, and her young nieces. Shall I try to induce Olympia to make a few remarks until the Senator gets here?"

A roar of applause went up.

"Jim's probably mentioned trying to induce me," said Olympia, blandly, dusting her face with powder and tucking back a nervous curl.

Jim Allen banged on the trailer door. Olympia opened it.

"Mrs. Slopshire, the Senator is unavoidably detained a few minutes. Won't you come over and just say howdy to the folks? Just pass away the time till the Senator gets here?"

"Now, Jim, you know I don't know a thing about politics! I leave all that to the Senator!" protested Aunt Olympia.

"Well, they want to see you anyhow. Just hear them cheering over there! You don't have to make a speech—just give them a smile! Come on, Mrs. Slopshire! Come on, girls."

"Don't forget any of those extemporaneous wise-cracks you've been thinking up all summer," whispered Limpy.

"If I do, you can prompt me," said Aunt Olympia, in high good humor.

"And don't swear," added Adele, "or they'll turn the mikes off."

The auditorium was packed to the doors; packed a hundred feet beyond the doors, in fact. There was a rear entrance giving easy access to the platform, but Jim Allen forced a way through the crowd to lead his smiling contingent right through the voting public.

"There she is!" "There they are!" "Good evening, Mrs. Slopshire!" "Rah, rah, rah, the ladies!" "The ladies, God bless them."

Half a dozen hands reached down from the platform to assist them to mount, Olympia, Helen, Adele and Limpy. The applause continued for ten minutes, while the ladies, looking very pretty, stood bowing, smiling, waving their hands. Limpy, remembering the brats, threw kisses.

Then Jim Allen roared for silence. "Ladies—ladies—and gentlemen!—This lady needs no introduction to you! She's your lady! This is our old friend, Olympia Slopshire! She won't make a speech, she just wants to say howdy!—Your lady, ladies and gentleman, Olympia Slopshire!"

Olympia advanced, smiling, to the rostrum and put her handbag and gloves on it. Then she turned and shook a playful finger at Jim.

"Now, Jim Allen, you only asked me to come and take a bow! You didn't say a word to me about making a speech," she protested gaily. "I can't make a speech; I don't

even know how to begin. Especially on politics. I always say one politician in a family is enough. Sometimes I think it is more than enough! Now if you wanted a speech on keeping the house, on running the family budget, on cheap recipes for canning fruit and making preserves, I could talk till election.

"Why, I am not even enough of a politician to call you constituents!" she cried, keeping well in range of the microphone. "You're not constituents to me! You're just friends, old friends and neighbors. That's all I know about politics.

"Now because you are only my friends and neighbors, I want you to meet these three dear little children of mine who have made me so happy and kept my heart and hands so full this year. . . . Girls, come on, stand up! I want them to see what you look like."

The girls tripped up and stood, smiling, grouped about her.

"Now those of you who have families," she went on, "understand that between providing nourishing meals, doing the mending and darning, superintending the laundry, safeguarding the health of my husband and these three children, I wouldn't have time to meddle in politics if I wanted to. But the girls mean more to me than politics. That's why I want you to be their friend and neighbor, as you are mine. . . . This is Helen! . . . This is Adele! . . . And this is my little Limpy! . . . Stand up on a chair, Limpy! So they can see you!" Limpy was boosted, blushing, upon a chair, but she rose to it gallantly and threw more kisses. "You can sit down now, girls.

"But I would not give you the wrong impression about

my attitude," continued Aunt Olympia with sudden earnestness. "I am interested—vitally interested—just as you are—in every detail, every movement, every law, every national policy, that affects our state and our country. Women *are* concerned with politics, because all problems that touch the home, the family, the school, the church, the health, are women's problems! What is there that concerns our nation that does not eventually lead straight to our homes, your home and mine? Labor, relief, flood control, wages and hours, taxation, even war itself, rearmament, a naval policy, the affairs of commerce and agriculture—all these are powerful electrical currents by which our homes are made safe and sweet, or are destroyed!

"And since by our American system of government—the most glorious system ever devised! May it never grow less!—since by our system, all these delicate problems of government, of justice, of fair play, and of protection, must be worked out through politics, then, yes, I am interested in politics. We're *all* interested in politics! What woman, worthy the name of wife, of mother, could remain uninterested and indifferent to the system by which food, clothing and shelter are provided for her children, which gives them education, which safeguards them from the ravages of war, which insures the security of their future, and endows them forever with the sacred right of freedom?

"So yes, to that extent, I am interested in politics. Well, now, in this campaign, you may be surprised to know," she said with a light laugh, "that these girls and I are for Senator Slopshire! . . . Aren't we, girls? Aren't we for the Senator!" The girls applauded prettily. "And why are we for the Senator? Because we know him; we know he can

be trusted; we know he understands our needs, our problems, and will work day and night, and give his lifeblood if necessary, for our well-being and the well-being of our friends and neighbors. . . . Now if I thought someone else—say some dentist or some—grocery clerk—or even, say, Brother Wilkie!—" She was silenced by a roar of boos—"Yes, say even Brother Wilkie! If I thought Brother Wilkie had better understanding in the ways of statesmanship, or more experience in the affairs of government, and could do more for us—for you and me, my friends, and for our children—why, then I'd come right out and vote for Brother Wilkie. I know Brother Wilkie makes a good preacher and I'd be glad to have him back in our pulpit as my pastor. But I also know that Senator Slopshire is a great statesman and a cracking good senator and here's one vote he can count on!"

Olympia sat down in a storm of applause and was obliged to rise and take a dozen or more bows. The girls had to rise and bow, too, and the committee had thoughtfully, almost prophetically, provided great bouquets of flowers for every one of them, which were presented with more applause. And by extraordinarily perfect timing, while the band was playing thunderously, while Olympia and the girls were waving their flowers to show their surprise and gratitude, the Senator arrived in person and came striding manfully down the aisle followed by his staff of assistants. Lights flashed, cameras clicked, and Limpy was boosted up to the chair again. Everybody stood up, and waved the American and the state flags with which they had been thoughtfully provided and the Senator was assisted to mount the rostrum. He shook hands cordially with every-

body seated on the platform, nodded to Olympia, and gave each of the girls a paternal pat.

"Put one of your rosebuds in Uncle Lancy's buttonhole, Limpy darling," cooed Aunt Olympia.

Limpy, flushed but laughing, hastily complied, and when she had it in place, the Senator rewarded her with a great fatherly hug and a resounding kiss. And the applause shook the auditorium.

Chapter XII

By agreement between the two state chairmen, the campaign proper was to close on Saturday night, the fifth of November. For that night, the wind-up, huge rallies had been arranged for each of the rival candidates, some seventy miles apart but both well toward the strategic center of the state. Sunday had been designated a day of rest, but at the last moment Brother Wilkie, yielding to what he called "insistent importunity," consented to speak again in the pulpit of the Methodist Church in Maysville, the largest church in the state. On Monday evening, each candidate had been allotted thirty minutes on the radio in a state-wide hook-up, but the battle royal—except for what Aunt Olympia called "the treachery of the pulpit"—was to end on Saturday night. The wind-up!

The girls, tired as they were, looked forward to that night with some eagerness, since it would turn the key to the matchless wind-up costumes, for which they had yearned all summer. It was well the campaign was nearly over. Aunt Olympia, hardy old trouper though she was, was near the breaking point and even in her sleep sustained a nervous flush from the roots of her hair down out of sight beneath her baby-blue down comfort. The girls were wan and weary-eyed. Cecil Dodd fell asleep several times, gazing straight into Aunt Olympia's blue but bloodshot eyes. Even Uncle Lancy's mild voice had taken on a slight edge, carefully filed down for constituential consumption.

On Monday, the trailer cavalcade took up its last headquarters in the Recreation Park at Radway. This was a happy stroke, as the park was well provided with pleasant facilities; riding horses for rent, swimming pool and bathhouse, tennis courts, good restaurants, a small hotel, a tavern.

Here the trailer was detached from the car and camp established for the biggest—and last—week of the campaign. No real cooking was undertaken; just enough to provide homey glimpses for the crowds which milled about. Their meals, except for a light breakfast, were taken in hotels or restaurants, though the larder was well stocked with emergency supplies sent daily from Shires by Hilda—fried chicken, sandwiches, cake and pie. Radway was twenty miles from Trentfare, where the Senator's wind-up rally was to be held. And after the rally, the last tired trek would return them to Shires to await the end. The Governor's final rally was slated for Lancaster, about forty miles from Radway in the opposite direction.

That was a terrible week. They campaigned from breakfast till midnight, constantly in the public eye; obliged to shake thousands of hands and to be pleasant until the smiles seemed frozen to their tired features.

"Honestly, Aunt Olympia," said Limpy wearily, "I'm developing a voter-phobia. Even in the middle of the night I feel eyes staring right through my best pajamas. Even when I cover up my head, I feel them."

"It's nearly over, thank God," said Aunt Olympia piously.

On the day of the wind-up, Saturday morning, they sat jadedly at breakfast in the little dinette of the trailer.

Limpy could not force herself to eat; she could not drink her coffee; could only sit, listless and dull, toying with her fork.

Aunt Olympia persisted in urging her.

"But I can't, Auntie, I tell you, I can't!" said Limpy impatiently. "The very thought of food chokes me right up."

Aunt Olympia gave her a straight hard look. There were dark circles under Limpy's lusterless eyes, there was no trace of her impish sparkle.

"Don't you feel well, Limpy?" quavered Aunt Olympia, herself distraught and keyed-up.

"Yes, I feel all right. I'm just not hungry. It makes me sick to see the rest of you eat."

"Del, call a doctor!" said Aunt Olympia, with tears of nervous weariness welling to her eyes.

"I don't want a doctor. I just need—to be let alone a minute," protested the badgered girl.

Aunt Olympia rose to it.

"Del, call the police!" she ordered briskly.

"Good heavens, Auntie, does one go to jail in this state if he can't eat?" ejaculated Limpy.

The Senator motioned from the window and a policeman came to the door.

"People have got to leave these girls alone," said Aunt Olympia. "You keep folks away from this trailer. Put guards around it. If we lose votes, we just lose them. Look at these children! Just look at them! Now you make it your business to keep people off!"

"No, don't do that, darling," said Helen. "This is the last day. We can stand it another day. We're just not

used to so much excitement and noise. We'll put Limpy to bed."

"We mustn't make anybody mad enough to vote for Brother Wilkie," Adele reminded her.

"Alençon Delaporte Slopshire," said Olympia reproachfully, "do you mean to sit there and tell me you would kill these children for the sake of a few paltry votes?"

The Senator, basely accused, reached for his glasses.

"Not at all, my dear! I never said any such thing. I'm sorry I ran. Let him have the election. Let him go to the Senate. At least, it'll keep him from leading in prayer next year and I don't know that I could sit through any more of his prayers."

Aunt Olympia, forgetting her own weariness, took forceful charge. She saw guards set about the trailer to insure privacy. She refused to let the girls accompany the Senator to Hillside, where he was to make an address in the afternoon; she refused to go herself, though it was unprecedented for him to make a campaign speech without a rosy Olympia smiling in the background. She ordered the Senator, Dave, Cece and the two secretaries to gather up all their papers and books and everything else they were likely to need and take them over to the sound truck. Then she ordered the girls to bed. She pulled down the blinds of the trailer windows; she saw that they were well supplied with magazines, books, candy and nuts; then she went out, closed the door and locked it.

She put the key in her pocket, established herself in a large camp chair where she could keep an eye on things, and went to sleep.

The girls, needing rest, accepted it gratefully. They

talked for a while, halfheartedly. Then they stretched out on their narrow beds to read and finally dozed off.

At noon the Senator, with Dave and Cecil and the secretaries, set off for Hillside, taking the big car, the sound truck and the small Fords, and promising to be back in good time for dinner to get an early start for Trentfare. The two motorcycle officers who constituted their escort roared after them.

Aunt Olympia saw them off, drowsily, and immediately went to sleep again. At three o'clock, the girls, well rested, banged on the door for release.

"You look better anyhow, if not your best," she greeted them crisply. "Come on over to the restaurant; I've got a good hot dinner ordered for you."

A couple of dozen cars were standing about the grounds and perhaps half a hundred people hung interestedly about.

"Don't look at them," ordered Aunt Olympia. "They're probably tourists from some other state anyhow. Don't even smile."

She had arranged to have their meal served in a small private dining room, secluded from boring eyes.

"Don't mention politics!" she commanded grimly.

"But Auntie, what else in the world is there to talk about?" demanded Limpy.

"Well, there's that worm, Brother Wilkie," said Aunt Olympia. "There's nothing political about him, except his ambition. And . . . let me see, there must be something else! . . . there's—groceries!" she finished triumphantly.

Helen flushed faintly.

"But there's so little to say about groceries," said Adele helpfully.

"There's plenty to say about them," said Aunt Olympia. "There's the high price of them, and the poor quality, and the rotten service of the delivery boys—"

"There's 'shoes and ships and sealing wax
And cabbages and kings,' " quoted Limpy.

"Certainly!" agreed Aunt Olympia.

They ate slowly, with lazy relish, and wandered out to the park again.

"We'll go and sit under the trees and talk some more about groceries," said Aunt Olympia purposefully. "For one hour! Then you go swimming!"

"Swimming?"

"In the bathhouse. I've arranged with the proprietor—for a small consideration—it'll be a present from your Uncle Lancy when I tell him about it—to keep everybody else out of the pool and let you have time to soak the campaign out of your joints. But you can't go for an hour after a meal."

Aunt Olympia had risen to the emergency.

"At five o'clock you go to the pool and swim and float and relax and forget politics. We don't have to leave here till seven-thirty. I'll lay out your wind-up costumes and have everything ready. You'll be new children tonight. For Uncle Lancy's sake, you've got to look your best!"

The girls cheerfully acquiesced. Aunt Olympia was the sort of woman who inspires acquiescence. At five o'clock they got into their smart bathing ensembles, draped their becoming bath capes around their shoulders, and tripped gaily into the bathhouse. Aunt Olympia went with them and saw them take their first plunges.

"Now take a good long time to it," she admonished them.

"I want you to limber up your nervous systems, and that takes time. I'll call you when I want you. I'm going to snatch a nap."

But Aunt Olympia had no such blessed opportunity that afternoon. Before she was more than stretched out on her cot, the roar of sirens announced the return of the Senator. He explained that a large crowd had gathered at Millsville, about halfway to Trentfare, an impromptu rally had been arranged and he had to dash right over and make them a speech.

"We'll have to hurry," he said.

"You can hurry all you've a mind to," said Olympia coldly. "The children have just gone for their bath and Lord knows they need a bath after all the mud that's been slung at us. They can't go."

"Perhaps I'd better just go on in the car then, and you can bring the girls and meet me at Trentfare. Or pick me up at Millsville."

"They particularly want to see Mrs. Slopshire," objected Dave. "They took up a collection and bought her a present. She's got to go along and we've got to get started."

Aunt Olympia was equal to the emergency. "Now, I tell you what," she said, thinking very fast. "Those girls are all tired out and they're having a lovely time over there alone. I'll go with you to Millsville and get my present. We'll take the trailer and I can dress on the way over. We'll take the cars, too, and leave Ben Baldy here to drive the sound truck over when the girls get ready. We'll put their wind-up clothes—I've got them laid out—in the truck for them and they can finish their bath and dress leisurely and be as fresh as daisies when they arrive. You pull the

truck up near the bathhouse and hitch onto the trailer. I'll go to the bathhouse and tell the girls."

Aunt Olympia went to the bathhouse on a weary trot. She was worn to what she herself tersely described as a hank of hair, but she did not falter. Thank God, it was the last day! She motioned the girls to come to the edge of the pool.

"Girls," she said, "the Senator's come and we've got to go to another meeting or two before Trentfare."

"We'll come right out," said Helen.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. You don't have to go to this meeting. It's impromptu." The girls grinned appreciatively at that; they had seen impromptu politics before.

"Yes, really impromptu, as far as I know," Aunt Olympia added thoughtfully. "Though they allowed themselves time to wire the park for loud speaking and buy me a present. . . . Anyhow, you don't have to go. You finish your swim and take all the time you want. We're leaving Ben Baldy to bring you over in the sound truck. You'd better lie down a while after your swim. . . . I'll put extra cushions in the truck. Dress your very prettiest. I'll have your wind-up clothes in the truck ready for you, and he'll get you there just in time for the close, so you'll be nice and fresh for it."

"That's fine, Auntie!"

"What a nice old Auntie!"

"The water's grand, Aunt Olympia. Why don't you chuck the meeting and have a plunge?"

"I can't. I've got to go and receive a present. Nothing makes you so mad as to have a present and nobody to present it to. I'll put a hamper of chicken and sandwiches

in the truck, too, as you won't be hungry. You can eat on the way over. I don't think your digestions will stand another hot-dog barbecue."

"Can we make speeches if we see anybody loitering around?"

"Sure. You must know what to say by this time!"

"Don't forget our powder and make-up!" said Adele.

"Don't forget the wind-up hats," said Limpy.

"I won't forget anything. And don't hurry, girls. I do want you to get freshened up. I want you to be as sweet as cherry blossoms. It's the wind-up."

"And Tuesday the pay-off!" said Limpy, blissfully treading water. "Uncle Lancy really owed us this bath."

Chapter XIII

The campaign had been spoiled for Len Hardesty, too, working for the Opposition. That was on account of Adele. Accepting her note of temporary dismissal in the the spirit of candid honesty in which it had been written, he no longer felt free to dash in at Shires or on the trailer troupe. The Senator would have received him as before, he knew that; so would Olympia. Probably even Helen, painfully schooling herself to accept the bitter exigencies of a political future, would have greeted him with quiet dignity. But not Adele; nor Limpy, who had made it clear to everyone that she would never speak to him again until Adele forgave him. And Adele wouldn't—not till after the election.

He wrote to Adele, apologetically and at rare intervals at first, half-fearing she would return the missives unopened. They did not come back. He could not be sure that she read them, though, knowing Adele, he felt reasonably sure that she did. But she made no answer. He wrote more frequently then and more ardently; these letters, too, were spared the ignominy of rejection. During October he wrote every day, usually by special delivery; and following the Senator's itinerary closely, as he was obliged to, he did not find it difficult to make sure that a reminder reached her every day. And every letter declared in conclusion, "I feel the same, darling, today, and shall feel the same all the rest of my life."

The Gallup Polls indicated that while the campaign was fairly close, the closing weeks showed a definite trend in the Senator's favor. This, Brother Wilkie rather ungratefully attributed to Len's coup in the spy business, which had not only missed fire but had resonantly redounded to his disadvantage. There was no real attack to be made on the Senator, for, as Len said bitterly, he had played his cards too close to the chest for that. He could not be too seriously besmirched for loyalty to the liberal tendencies of the Administration, for Brother Wilkie himself had, against Len's counsel, come out for the Townsend Old-Age pension.

They could only fall back on the Senator's "innocuous mildness," his "hopeless inefficiency." As for his mildness, Len knew—and the voters knew—that once the Senator got his glasses wiped and his feet on the ground, he would take no back-talk from any one but Olympia.

Len's personal future did not look any too bright, except for the one ray of divine effulgence that after the election he would see Adele. But to have Adele—even to ask for Adele—he must have a job, money. The Governor's failure would be a smudgy blot on Len's record. Naturally, he could expect no help from the Senator. If only he could insure that the race would be close, a struggle to the last vote, it would minimize the defeat. Another coup was called for.

"The Senator is hopelessly inefficient." But there was nothing one could put hand on to support that accusation. He had answered—with a good deal of help, of course—every argument advanced against him. His personal affairs were above reproach. He had inherited some money,

some property; he had made more money, had added to and improved his holdings. Shires was well-kept-up, well-administered; it even made money, a thing almost unheard-of among gentry farm folk. The Senator was known to be both liberal with labor and just to capital. All this made Len's job a hard one.

"The Senator is inefficient." But to prove it?

In desperation, on Tuesday, the first of November, Len called to confidential conference Spike O'Connor, the Governor's chauffeur.

"Now see here, Spike," he began, "you've had a very easy summer of it—just touring the state, looking at the scenery, escorting the seven bra— er, cherubs—and now you've got to do the Governor one good he-man turn before the wind-up."

"Wha'da ya mean, seven cherubs? I ain't seen no cherubs an' I been to church regular every Sunday morning for four months which wasn't included in the agreement that I got to go to church. Not that I call them Methodists no rightful church myself," he added hastily. "But, anyhow, I been."

"I'll get Frank to take over the cherubs from this on," promised Len. "You're entitled to a rest. But there's one thing you've got to do. You've got to help us prove that Senator Slopshire is hopelessly inefficient."

"Any senator that's smart enough to pick himself out three good-looking skirts in place o' them brats of ours ain't my idea of no inefficiency," said Spike, firmly.

Len let that go; it accorded too closely with his own ideas. "A man who cannot safeguard his home, his property, his campaign equipment, from—external ravage—is

certainly not to be trusted with the intricate affairs of this sovereign state," he declared.

"Well, I don' know but I'd as soon commit a few ravages as go to church any more—which ain't rightly no church, in my opinion," said Spike reasonably.

"Right! Perfectly right! Now on Saturday night he's going hobnobbing and grandstanding all over the state with that elegant sound truck of his: all plebeian dirt outside and luxury within! . . . So what? So right from under his nose, we're going to swipe that sound truck and show him up for the hopeless inefficient that he is."

"Did you say we, or me?" asked Spike uneasily.

"Both. It's my idea but you'll do the practical demonstration," said Len cheerfully. "They don't guard anything. They're a bunch of nincompoops. They leave their doors wide open—to everybody but me, that is," he added bitterly. "They leave the keys in the locks, the switches turned on—everything wide open. Now, you'll swipe the sound truck and bring it over to Lancaster for the big rally. We'll have the Governor bring out how careless and indifferent and inefficient the Senator is, and then we'll turn on the floodlights and there'll be you and the Senator's sound truck! A man that isn't smart enough to look after his own sound truck on the wind-up night is certainly not one to be trusted with the future of this sovereign state."

"What's in it for me?" asked Spike, practically.

"Surcease from the brats is reward enough," said Len. "However, here are a hundred dollars for your expenses. You get that sound truck and keep it hidden until election night and bring it to our rally, and there's a two-hundred-dollar bonus in it for you—spot cash. And a job, beside, if the Governor wins."

"I could hide it in that dump back of my place," said Spike thoughtfully. "I got a half-interest in that dump."

"Right. Just get it. And hide it. And have it at the rally at Lancaster. That's all. Two hundred cash—a job—and you'll be a hero, Spike."

"Yeh, if I ain't in stripes. I ain't seen many heroes in stripes."

"You won't be in stripes. The Senator'll have to keep it out of the courts to save his face. You'd better get a motorcycle—no, a motorcycle makes too much noise and attracts too much attention. You'd better drum up a little old run-down weather-beaten Ford and just go trailing them around. Take your time. Don't rush it. We won't need it till Saturday night. They're installed now at Radway, and will be there all week. You go over, join the troupe, watch your chance and get us that truck for Saturday night."

"Okay, boss," said Spike.

"Will you get the truck?"

"Sure. I've as good as got it. With the understanding," he added hastily, "that I ain't called on to attend no heathen churches next morning."

"Okay!"

From Len Hardesty's recital of the ease of its accomplishment, Spike O'Connor was not prepared for the hard luck he encountered in carrying out his enterprise. When his ramshackle old roadster pulled into the grounds at Radway, it attracted no attention at all. The Senator's processional was often followed by half a dozen or more cars that nobody knew anything about. Spike had large VOTE FOR SLOPSHIRE posters prominently displayed on the car and wore a SLOPSHIRE button, a cheap but-

ton, not platinum and set with brilliants like Limpy's, but much larger. All VOTE FOR SLOPSHIRES were welcome to join the cavalcade.

But the camp was a bristling bustle of activity from morning till night. There were chauffeurs, reporters, cameramen, policemen; there were county chairmen, visiting delegates, reception committees, local delegations. On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday the sound truck was in constant use; at night, Ben Baldy slept on the cushions on the floor of it.

By Saturday, Spike was nearly desperate. And Saturday was worse. Aunt Olympia set a guard of officers around the trailer early in the morning and the sound truck was within ten feet of it. Aunt Olympia, evidently not trusting the police, planted herself under a tree, where ostensibly she was asleep but definitely on guard. No chance!

About noon, the Senator drove off in the truck with Ben Baldy, followed by the extra cars and what seemed to be the entire staff, including the police escort. Not even a man of Spike's resourcefulness could steal a sound truck with a United States Senator on the front seat speaking through the microphone. Spike could only wait. Naturally of a philosophical frame of mind, however, his dejection was slightly modified by the knowledge that he had enjoyed four days of blessed relief from the company of the brats, and that he had spent only ten dollars of his expense money. Still, Spike was proud; he had said he would get that sound truck; it would be a definite blot on his record to fail in the mission.

At five o'clock the Senator came roaring back with his noisy escort, and presently, after a good deal of dashing

about and giving orders and shouting instructions, the big car with the Senator and Mrs. Slopshire, the small car pulling the trailer, three small Fords, filled with miscellaneous assistants, and the police escort, went screaming out of the Recreation Park. Only the sound truck was left, pulled up near the deserted bathhouse. But it was not left alone. Ben Baldy sat erect and watchful on the driver's seat. Spike dallied for a while with the idea of trying to bribe him with the balance of the expense money, but abandoned that idea as unworthy of him. He sat on the running board of his car and watched Ben Baldy and the sound truck. Ben Baldy sat as if glued to the driver's seat.

As dusk came on, a slow drizzle of rain began to fall and the park grounds were swiftly deserted. Spike, with a last hopeless look at Ben's silent figure, went dejectedly across the park and into the tavern for a glass of beer.

If he had made this move by studied design instead of at the prompting of thirst, it would have been the smartest act of Spike's life.

The moving figure in the drizzling rain of the deserted park attracted Ben Baldy's attention. His eyes followed Spike through the rain, straight to the door of the tavern. A stream of bright warm light shot out; the strains of swinging dance music—a pleasant change from the *Star Spangled Banner* he had been having all summer. The door closed. The light was cut off. The music died.

Ben Baldy looked at his watch. A quarter to seven. He looked at the bathhouse door. No sign of the girls. He got down from the driver's seat and followed Spike O'Connor into the tavern. Spike greeted him with his broadest Irish smile. They went simultaneously to the bar.

"Wet night, brother," said Ben Baldy sociably.

"How come you ain't over to the rally?" said Spike. "Ain't you with the Senator?"

Ben Baldy had some grievance of his own, apart from the long wait. "Aw, they switched me onto the truck. They went ahead to the rally—with barbecue and beer thrown in—and left the girls in swimmin'. I got to take them when they come out. In my opinion they spoil them girls. I got girls of my own, and I don't leave my Number One chauffeur and my sound truck to pack them around country when they got swum up," he said resentfully.

"Where they at now?" asked Spike.

"Still swimming. Swim all night, like as not. I just got to wait. Mis' Slopshire says them girls' bath comes before the election."

"I'm paying, brother," said Spike generously. "How about a double whisky?"

"The Senator don't allow no hard drinkin' on campaign," said Ben bitterly. "He says it riles the Prohibition."

"The Senator ain't around now and ain't likely to be around till after that rally. And if them girls is as countrified as the papers make out, they won't know the difference between a whisky and a coke. Set 'em up. . . . On me. Double whiskys."

Spike took one generous draught of his liquor; he felt he needed that. Then he said, "Watch mine, will you? I want to see if I locked that bus."

He sauntered leisurely across the room to the door. But once outside, without a look toward his ramshackle Ford, he went on a dead run for the sound truck, standing, de-

serted and alone, near the bathhouse door. . . . Yes, there it was! He leaped into the driver's seat, turned the switch, pressed on the starter and the sound truck plunged forward out of the camp grounds into the highway, turning north, headed for the Governor's rally at Lancaster.

What with the roar of the truck, the song of triumph in his ears, and the clinking of two hundred prospective dollars in his imagination, Spike O'Connor could not possibly have heard the three faint screams of surprise that went up from the interior as the truck got under way. The girls had leisurely finished their bath, as admonished by Aunt Olympia, had skipped lightly from the bathhouse into the truck and were cheerfully making ready to rub themselves down in that small enclosure when it drove off.

After the first shock, they pulled themselves together.

"We must have stayed too long," said Helen. "We'll have to dress as we go. Where's the bag, Adele?"

"I don't see it anywhere. Where's the switch?"

"Wait! Don't touch it with wet hands. That's dangerous. Let me do it."

Helen pressed the button and the truck was palely flooded with light.

"Here's food," said Limpy. "That's something. It'll take an hour to get there. Let's eat first."

"It's pretty cold," said Helen. "We'd better dress first."

But seeing Limpy already cheerfully at work on a drumstick, the others followed suit, sitting on cushions on the floor of the rocking sound truck.

"Isn't this fun?" said Adele. "I'm glad they didn't wait for us. It's such a relief to eat without smirking at photographers. Sandwich, please, Glutton."

Blissfully unaware that they were en route to the wrong meeting, the girls nibbled down to the last bone of chicken, the last crumb of sandwich and cooky. Then Limpy, sighing contentedly, stretched out full-length on the floor of the truck.

"Auntie said rest," she reminded them.

"You get right up from there and put your clothes on," said Helen firmly. "If you catch cold, you know who'll be blamed for it."

"God," said Limpy.

"Helen," said Helen. "Or Uncle Lancy, or Brother Wilkie, or poor old Cece; anybody but dear precious little Limpy. You mosey right into your clothes and don't argue."

"And remember the cameras that wait us over there," said Adele, slithering out of her damp bath cape.

"Over there!" sang Limpy. "Over there! The cameras are clicking over there!"

"Where's the bag, Helen?"

But search which soon became panicky failed to produce the suitcase and the wind-up costumes, or the big box with the smart black and white fall felts. Not only were there no wind-up costumes; there were no clothes at all, of any description, except a pair of pajamas and two clean shirts belonging to Ben Baldy, who slept in the truck.

"She must have forgotten them," said Helen. "We'll just have to keep as warm as we can till we get there. She'll be on the look-out for us at the other end. Poor dear, no wonder she forgot! What a summer she's had!"

So the girls, more amused than alarmed, rubbed them-

selves down with the towels, drew the drenched capes about them and snuggled together on cushions on the floor of the truck, awaiting their arrival, and Aunt Olympia, and clothes.

"She'll be sick if we don't get to wear those costumes," said Limpy. "She set thousands of votes by those costumes."

"Don't worry about the costumes. She'll see that we get them before we hit the platform. She has probably got a police escort guarding them now. . . . Helen, shouldn't we turn off the lights, so we can slink in unobserved till we get dressed?"

So they turned off the lights and crouched together again in what comfort they could, not at all worried, and jolted swiftly along the road toward the wrong wind-up.

When the truck came into dense traffic, they proceeded more slowly but still steadily, for a way was cleared for them, with shrieking sirens, police whistles and the roar of motorcycles. The girls, having campaigned all summer, were used to having their way cleared for them. They got up on their knees on the benches that topped the filing cabinets and raised the narrow windows slightly, not enough to be seen but to keep sharp lookout for the trailer and Aunt Olympia. They were cold now and shivered in their damp robes.

Suddenly Adele gave a sharp exclamation. "Helen! How nasty! Look at that. Someone has strung up a Wilkie banner! How hateful!"

" 'Vote for Governor Wilkie,' " read Helen amazedly. "Well, I suppose everything has to happen in a campaign."

"There's another one," said Limpy angrily. " 'A Good

Governor Makes a Good Senator.' . . . Helen, look! They're all Wilkie banners! I don't see a Sloppy anywhere."

The truck pulled into the camp grounds where a space had been reserved and roped off for it. The girls still stared through the little darkened windows, hoping to escape the attention of news and cameramen until Aunt Olympia could come to the aid of the campaign with their costumes.

"Girls," Helen whispered suddenly. "Look! It's the wrong rally! There's Brother Wilkie on the platform. There's Len Hardesty standing on the steps."

"Why, Ben's brought us to the wrong rally!" said Adele. "You'd think he would know it by this time!"

"He must be drunk," said Helen. "I'll tell him."

They ran to the front of the truck and banged furiously on the small locked doors that separated the driver's seat from the body. They called, softly at first, then as loudly as they could scream, "Ben! Ben Baldy! Oh, Ben!"

There was no answer.

Spike O'Connor, having thus against all odds triumphantly accomplished his delicate and difficult mission, had gone to receive the sweet reward of high success. Having drawn the truck into the enclosure, he had turned off the switch and leaped to the ground, where he now stood, hat in hand across proud breast, awaiting the glare of floodlights, the explosion of photographer's bulbs, the plaudits of the multitude. In the clamor, even if he heard the faint pounding and the screaming from the truck, it was softened and mellowed by the handclapping and cheers about him. He did not relinquish his pose; it was a good one and he knew it. He waited motionless.

The girls gave up at last and ran despairingly to the rear of the truck. Helen opened the door an inch or two, hoping to see some familiar or friendly face. But the surging sea of faces drove them swiftly back to the comparative safety of darkness.

"Uncle Lancy'll fire Ben Baldy for this," said Adele.

"Aunt Olympia'll strangle him," said Limpy.

They climbed back to their narrow perches and peered interestedly through the small high windows to witness the Republican rally. Adele's eyes clung to Len Hardesty's lean face, where he stood alertly on the steps that led to the platform. Helen watched Brother Wilkie, hoping to pick up pointers for Brick Landis, but Limpy grinned amusedly at the seven children and the beldame, conspicuous in the front row of seats on the platform, a little to the left of Brother Wilkie, so that his figure would not hide them from public view. The Governor was evidently among friends, for he was getting a very good hand.

Len Hardesty had been on intent lookout for the sound truck. There it came! There it was! A faint semblance of a smile softened his set features. A stroke of genius! It wouldn't win the governor many votes perhaps, but it would certainly make talk, and better still, it would create laughter. It would embarrass Sloppy. It would show Olympia he wasn't to be sneezed at.

"Here's the truck," he wrote on a card and passed it up to the Governor.

"Be ready with the lights," he said to the engineer who stood beside him.

The Governor finished his paragraph. Then he paused dramatically.

"My friends," he bellowed suddenly, "we have charged that your representative in the Senate of the United States—Alençon Delaporte Slopshire—is a careless, indifferent, inefficient man! Too careless, too inefficient, to be trusted to safeguard the rights of this sovereign state! We have been challenged to produce proof of that charge! Tonight, we bring that proof! . . . Do you believe—is any child innocent enough to believe—that a man who cannot protect his own property, cannot preserve his own rights, cannot safeguard his own interests, can be trusted to safeguard the property, the rights, the interests of our sovereign state! Ladies and gentlemen, on this night of all nights in this campaign, at this crucial moment, Senator Slopshire has shown himself so careless, so inefficient, that he has allowed his own campaign sound truck to be driven off under his very nose! Ladies and gentlemen—this is our proof! We give you the Slopshire Sound Truck! It stands before you!"

"Now!" said Len Hardesty to the engineer.

Immediately floodlights from all over the park were flashed on that silent tomb, the Senator's sound truck. The girls crouched down out of sight below the small windows. Spike O'Connor, stern, unsmiling, accepted his honors with a stiff bow. A roar went up from the crowd, hand-clapping, cheers; and boos for Slopshire.

When the applause had somewhat subsided, the Governor went on:

"Here, my friends, you have actual, physical, incontrovertible proof of our charge of inefficiency. In the face of this testimony, what can be said of the Senator's sagacity, his senatorial watch-care of our state's rights, his

guardianship of the sacred privilege of our common citizenship? Tonight—at this hour—Senator Slopshire is supposed to be making an intensive drive for votes in this state, addressing gathered crowds through the microphone of this sound truck. This is the truck that carries his valuable papers, his books, his files, his notes; as well as his loud-speaking equipment. Can you trust a man who can't take care of his own property, to take care of yours?

"Ah, ladies and gentlemen, in the Holy Book of our Fathers, in Divine Scripture, what is declared to be the fate of those wicked and slothful servants, who, not being faithful in small things, cannot be trusted with greater things? Is it to him these words were spoken, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things?' Ah, no! That wicked and slothful servant, careless, inefficient, faithless in small things, is to be cast into the outer darkness and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"But this Good Book of Guidance offers counsel and advice for all; yea, even to the wicked and slothful servant, faithless in small things! Come back with me to Proverbs, and read this admonition. 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise.' . . . Go to the ant, Senator Slopshire, consider her ways, and be wise."

Limpy could stand no more. "Give me that mike!" she said passionately. "I'll tell them a thing or two."

And as the roar of applause died down, suddenly the tomb of inefficiency found voice and spoke. Limpy, standing tense and rigid between the cabinets, bawled bravely into the microphone.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Listen to me a minute! It's the most outrageous lie I ever heard!"

Startled silence gripped the crowd. Was this a plant? At any rate, it was dramatic. All eyes were riveted to the truck.

"I'm Limpy Rutherford, and Senator Slopshire's my uncle and there never lived a better uncle than my Uncle Lancy. This is the most despicable outrage I ever heard of!"

Len Hardesty collapsed on the bottom step. "Oh, my God, he swiped the kid with it!" he groaned.

"Anyhow, he didn't cross the state line so they can't get us on that," said the engineer consolingly.

"My Uncle Lancy is the most honorable, most gentlemanly, most—conscientious person that ever lived. I've lived with him a year and I ought to know. And he's efficient, too. He's terribly efficient. I know his car hasn't run out of gas since we've been here, and that's efficient. You know Methodist preachers! They're always running out of gas. Lots of times we ran out of gas on our way home from church. All preachers do. Do you call that efficient?

"And he's a good Senator, too. Everybody in the Senate just loves Uncle Lancy; even Republicans love him—all the important ones, that amount to anything. McNary just dotes on him, he said so himself. And Vandenburg thinks everything in the world of Uncle Lancy. He told me if Uncle Lancy was a Republican he'd be presidential timber. And Uncle Lancy's a good Christian, too, I don't care if he is a senator!

"I know all about the Scripture! I was brought up on the Bible; the real Bible, I mean, not political propaganda.

Doesn't it say something in the Bible about a man who is a sneak in small things being a sneak in big things, and if it wasn't sneaking to swipe my Uncle's truck, then I don't know sneaks when I see them. And doesn't the Bible say, 'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you'?

"Well, that's the kind of a Christian my Uncle Lancy is! Would he stoop to stealing Brother Wilkie's sound truck—and commit thievery—just to win a few votes? Certainly not! He wouldn't think of it! Do you think for one minute my Uncle Lancy would steal Brother Wilkie's brats?"

"Oh, Limpy, don't say brats!" moaned Helen.

"I mean children," Limpy corrected herself hastily. "He wouldn't do it, anyhow. He wouldn't soil his fingers with them! He's too much of a gentleman and too much of a Christian and too good a senator. And even though I'm a Republican myself, if I had a vote, do you know who I'd vote for? I'd vote for Uncle Lancy—that's who! I'd vote for him a thousand times if I could and go to jail for it, and it would be worth it, too. I'd be glad to go to jail for Uncle Lancy. He—he's a—swell—guy."

Tears began welling to Limpy's eyes. A lump rose in her throat. She struggled on. "My Uncle Lancy is—just—swell."

Limpy collapsed in a passion of tears on the floor of the truck. Helen grabbed Limpy. Adele grabbed the microphone.

Suddenly her low, even voice swept over the crowd, still gripped in awed, electrical silence.

"My sister is perfectly right. Every word she said is the gospel truth. I'm Adele."

"Oh, my God, he got them all!" gasped Len Hardesty, and started for the truck.

"I have never been so shocked in my life," continued Adele. "I just wouldn't have believed a Methodist preacher would stoop to it! Our Methodist preachers in Iowa wouldn't do it! That's not the kind of preachers we have. And if Brother Wilkie is so fond of the Scripture, he'd better read up on that handwriting on the wall business; if he doesn't see handwriting tonight, he will next Tuesday!"

"Play, you idiots!" roared Brother Wilkie, and the band swept, too late, into the cheerful strains of "Don't you weep for me."

But already the crowd had moved away from the platform and was massing around the sound truck, once more standing silent, grim and tomblike. Reporters nosed closer, closer. Cameras turned on it from every direction. Light bulbs exploded. Len Hardesty pushed his way through. He beat on the door of the truck.

"Adele! Open this door! Come out of that truck!"

Adele opened the door. Light flashed about her, cameras clicked, the crowd roared. Adele, wide-eyed, fair damp curls clustering about her pale face, slim bare legs shivering beneath the short damp cape, stood clearly revealed. Helen, with the weeping Limpy in her arms, was behind her.

Len took one look. "Adele!" he roared. "Get back in that truck and put on your clothes."

"We haven't any clothes," said Adele pathetically. "They stole our clothes, too." Her teeth chattered nervously. "We're half-frozen." And she slammed the door.

Len Hardesty flung himself against it, facing the cheering, laughing crowd. He was haggard and wild-eyed.

"Smash those cameras!" he cried to the police. "Break those plates! Get those pictures!"

But the officers, looking somewhat belligerent though working for the Opposition, made no move. This, they thought, was spreading it on pretty thick. It looked like a case for the G-Men to them.

The crowd, too, was beginning to mutter, almost menacingly. This, definitely, was carrying things too far, even in a mud-slinging campaign.

And then, from the distance, came the roar of approaching motors, the shriek of sirens, the scream of police whistles. Nearer, nearer!

"Oh, my God, it's the police!" groaned Len Hardesty. "Well, they'll get into this truck over my dead body!"

And he planted himself more firmly against the door of the truck, both arms outstretched, a figure of grim defiance.

Chapter XIV

It was the police—a thoroughly outraged and vengeful police escort, reinforced by a dozen or more additional officers from Uncle Lancy's big rally. The escort was offended to the depths of its being. It is true, it had not been in the immediate vicinity of the commission of this crime against law and order. Still, it had been detailed to the Senator for the campaign, and to have three girls and a sound truck kidnaped from under its nose, as it were, was certainly going to make talk. It might even instigate an investigation. At the very least it would hold the police force in general—and this detail in painful particular—up to public scorn and ridicule. So the faces of the escort were grim and set. The police would get back their orphans or die trying.

The roaring onsweep of motors was the noisy approach of the Senator and Aunt Olympia, in pursuit of their children.

Aunt Olympia never forgave her subconscious for not affording her some premonition of what was to happen that fateful night. She hadn't so much as a suspicion. She had gone off with the cars and the trailer in a state of sublime, if somewhat weary, complacency; she was certainly taking good care of those girls. She had said they should have a day of rest and they were getting a day of rest. Nothing like a little exercise and a lot of water to soak the

jadedness out of your nervous system; that was Aunt Olympia's opinion.

A beaming Madonna with a clear conscience and a red face, she accompanied the Senator on his last trek; received with him the plaudits of the crowds, accepted bouquets, and at Millsville dimpled rosily over the handsome evening bag presented with a good deal of ceremony. She listened attentively to the Senator's speeches, applauding good points, the incarnation of devoted wifeliness and temporary motherhood.

Eventually they arrived at the last round-up, Trentfare. There she received her fourth bouquet, the others being left out of sight on the floor of the automobile. She didn't mind at all because the girls were late.

"God knows they need a rest from all the speech-making," she thought leniently. "They'll get here in time for the wind-up—in those costumes—looking like angels. They'll be a sensation. They'll cinch every floater for miles around."

She smiled, she shook hands, she acknowledged introductions and took bows, and then fluttered down in her chair with modest decorum. But she couldn't help keeping watch for the girls. Her fond eyes yearned for the blessed sight of them, in those works of art.

Just as the Senator was getting well launched in what was to be the climactic closing speech of the campaign, suddenly the haggard face of Ben Baldy appeared at the side door of the platform. He waved grimy hands toward Aunt Olympia, he shook his head, he scowled. Someone seated near the door whispered to him. A message trickled along the front row until it reached Aunt Olympia.

"He wants to speak to you."

Even then Aunt Olympia was not startled. It was the girls, of course; probably wanting to know whether they should come right on or wait until the Senator had finished. She rose, carrying the huge bouquet, and tiptoed over the feet of the front-row honor guests on the platform, whispering apologies, until she reached the door.

With a big, soiled finger Ben motioned her to come a little farther.

"Mis' Slopshire," he whispered tersely. "They swiped our girls."

Olympia drew herself together into her familiar posture of hauteur.

"Baldy, have you been drinking?"

"I wish to God I had been," he answered, in a voice both evasive and devout. "Brother Wilkie done it. They swiped the sound truck and the girls along with it while I was—snatching a bite. A cop brought me in a side car."

"Brother Wilkie—swiped—" she said quaveringly, her knees going weak.

"Republicans, anyhow. And rushed 'em off seventy miles an hour—to the other rally."

"Where are the girls, Ben, where are my girls?" she demanded, her voice going swiftly crescendo.

"They're swiped."

"But where are they now? What's happened to them?"

"They're still swiped."

Aunt Olympia was game to the depths of her being. Even to this catastrophe, she arose with rampant resourcefulness.

"We must head off the Senator," she said. "He'll kill Brother Wilkie for this! . . . Wait here, Baldy. I'll go down front and catch his eye."

The Senator, working up to one of his best points, was a good deal surprised to see a pale and grim-lipped Olympia appear before him below the speaker's stand. Her rightful place was in a good position on the platform. But even a pale Olympia gave him courage. Not a bad idea, getting down there where he could catch her glare. Olympia, who had a stimulating effect on perfect strangers, was almost intoxicating to the Senator.

He went on, with greater eloquence. In the burst of applause that followed the paragraph, he glanced complacently down for a beam of approval. Imagine his amazement to see Olympia silently weeping, swabbing at her under-chin. The Senator tried desperately to recall if he had said anything of a pathetic nature to arouse her emotions, but there had been no pathos in this speech; this was a fighting speech and Olympia never cried over fights. He gazed at her distractedly. Falteringly he took up the next paragraph, but he couldn't get his mind off Olympia, sobbing silently almost beneath his feet.

"Clap, boys," he whispered to those behind him on the packed platform.

Accepting the cue, they broke into hearty applause, and the audience joined willingly enough. Taking advantage of this interval, the Senator leaned over the rostrum.

"What's the matter?"

"The Republicans stole the children. Kidnaped them. They've got the children."

"What!"

She nodded her head, tears streaming down a face in which the last vestige of rose had faded, even to her lips. "Stole them. Got them. All of them."

The Senator rose to dramatic heights of which even Olympia had never dreamed he was capable. He towered to a height which was really impressive for his somewhat slight stature. He raised his hand for silence. He leaned forward again.

"What did you say, my dear?" he asked, clearly.

"Brother Wilkie stole our truck and kidnaped our children. They took them to the other rally."

The Senator raised both arms. Mild though he was supposed to be, the united Opposition would have quailed before his look at that moment.

"My friends," he said, and there was the venom of murder in his voice. As for the sweating throng, this being a decided innovation in a campaign which had not been dull, an almost unearthly silence gripped it.

"My friends, I came here tonight prepared to answer briefly, decisively, every issue that has been raised in this campaign. But my campaign is ended at this moment. I shall not continue my speech. I am obliged to leave you. I have just learned that the Opposition, reduced in their extremity to dastardly deeds of violence, have stolen those three children who are dearer to my wife and me than our very lives. They have taken our children. Ladies and gentlemen, I relinquish the campaign; I leave it in your hands. For myself, I go to rescue our girls from this act of wanton depravity. Let your votes fall where they may."

He leaped nimbly down from the platform and put his arm around Olympia. The audience waited in taut silence, anticipating some further, exciting denouement. But Jim Allen, the state chairman, did not wait. He, too, leaped from the platform and caught the Senator by the arm.

"Senator, for God's sake, you can't do that!" he said. "You can't walk out on us! You'll offend every Democrat in the state. The kids will be all right. Nobody'll hurt 'em. But we've got every county chairman in the state here; we've got committees from every club; they'll never forgive you."

The Senator drew himself up.

"Unhand me, Jim," he said thickly.

"You can't go, Senator; I won't permit it; I've worked too damn hard on this!"

The Senator let go of Olympia. He took his glasses carefully in his left hand. He doubled his right fist, rose toweringly on his toes—Jim was a tall man—and delivered a surprisingly straight, clean uppercut to Jim Allen's face. Jim Allen, felled more by surprise than by the force of the blow, sank to the floor.

"Come, Olympia!" said the Senator, gently, replacing his glasses.

Olympia, even in this crisis, did not forget that she was a lady. As she stepped, carefully, though blinded with weeping, over the prostrate form of Jim Allen, she hesitated long enough to murmur, "So sorry, Jim!" And the Senator led her away.

The crowd waited. . . . There would be another act, of course. . . . On the whole, it was well-pleased. The constituents had had three months of speechmaking and band music and handshaking. A kidnaping was something new. So they waited.

Olympia was pushed into the rear seat of the big car. The Senator clambered after her and took her in his arms.

"Be brave, my dear, be calm," he said, through clenched

teeth, and the cameramen got a very good flash of them, the Senator looking stern and noble, with Olympia in his arms, weeping like Rachel for her lost children. Police cleared the way. The big car rolled off.

The crowd was a little surprised to hear the roaring of motors as the car went off. But they waited. They would be back, probably, in five minutes, with the lovely young girls in tow. But when Jim Allen, slowly rallying, struggled to his feet, wiping blood from his face, they rose instinctively. If that blood wasn't beet juice, this was real drama. Jim Allen was helped to the platform.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he roared, still mopping blood. "That's our candidate! That's the man we Democrats stand for! What's an election to a man whose home has been ravaged? What are votes to a Democrat whose most sacred feelings have been profaned? That's the candidate we give you—one who will knock down his state chairman to go to the aid of his children! Ladies and gentlemen, do what you like with this rally. I'm going to help our candidate rescue our children!"

Evidently, then, it was no plant. As the constituents streamed out of the auditorium following Jim Allen, whose nose continued to bleed with theatrical profusion, their resentment rose. These were their orphans who had been subjected to this outrage!

"Call the police!" "Get out the G-Men!" "Give us our children!" "Down with Wilkie!" "Were the police asleep?"

A pandemonium of cars swept away in the wake of the Senator. The wind-up rally joined the rescue. A dozen busses, hastily filled, followed more slowly. Only those luckless ones remained who had come on foot or by train

and had no emergency conveyance. These, left behind, eventually clustered together and burst into noisy imprecations of the Opposition, interspersed with cheers for Sloppy, boos for Wilkie, and finally fell into a sustained chant:

"We want our orphans! We want our orphans! We want our orphans!"

Unfortunately, the Senator and Aunt Olympia were unaware of this loyal demonstration. They had retired from the campaign in a dead silence, over the prostrate form of good old Jim Allen, the state chairman; followed, so far as they knew, by the unbounded indignation of an offended constituency.

For twenty noisy miles, Olympia was satisfied to sob on the Senator's breast, in which burned a volcano of suppressed passion. Finally she found voice.

"I only wanted them—to rest a little, Del," she said humbly. "I left Ben to bring them. I thought of course they would be safe."

"Be calm, my dear, be brave," said the Senator, patting her shoulder with a hand that itched for Brother Wilkie's throat.

"If they've harmed a hair of those children's heads," moaned Olympia, "I'll choke him with my bare hands, preacher or no preacher. . . . And what's more, I'll sue him."

"Be calm, Ollie, be brave," crooned the Senator, between set teeth.

So it was Aunt Olympia and the Senator, with a belligerent police escort, who roared into the Republican rally at Lancaster.

As soon as the car came to a halt, the Senator crawled over Olympia's feet and started to get out.

"You stay here! This is no place for a woman! This is going to be a knock-down, drag-out engagement!"

His ferocity terrified Aunt Olympia. She was as mad as he was, and just as determined to fight it out. But she wished he would leave it to her. After all, her first responsibility was the Senator. She grabbed him with both hands. After the wear and tear of the long campaign, at his age, in his state of health, he was not physically able to cope with a set of blackguards who would stoop to such depths of lawlessness. He must not impair his dignity by engaging in a common street brawl with ruffians. Besides, he would get his glasses broken. So she hung on and was drawn with him from the tonneau.

And the first thing she saw was Len Hardesty, standing with both arms outstretched against the rear door of the sound truck, from which the police had gradually edged the crowd away.

"Len Hardesty—you—you give me my children! You let them right out of there this minute or I'll call the police!"

"Shut up, Olympia," he said. "They can't come out. They haven't any clothes on!"

"They haven't any clothes—" Suddenly Aunt Olympia remembered. She had forgotten to take the suitcase from the trailer. "Del!" she cried. "They'll—catch their death of cold!" And would have collapsed, had she not been supported by the Senator and a couple of policemen.

The girls, watching from the narrow little windows at the top of the rear door, had seen the beloved and shelter-

ing, though agitated, figures of the Senator and Aunt Olympia.

Limpy opened the door defiantly.

"Len Hardesty!" she screamed. "You give me my Uncle Lancy, this minute! You give him right here!" The defiant voice then rose to a familiar wail. "Aw, Uncle Lancy!"

When had Uncle Lancy heard that appeal in vain? He did not hesitate a moment. He relinquished Olympia to the arms of the policemen with all the dignity of an old Roman, in smart fall coat instead of toga, and bore down on the truck. He didn't say a word. He waved his arm and Len Hardesty stood aside. The Senator stumbled up the steps.

"My poor children—" he began. But Limpy interrupted.

"Come over here to this mike and give them a piece of your mind," she ordered. "They said the most outrageous things about you. They said you were a hopeless inefficient and turned the lights on us to prove it. Tell them, Uncle Lancy!"

"My dear—" he remonstrated gently.

"Here's the mike," said Limpy.

There was only one thing to do in the presence of a microphone. Uncle Lancy cleared his throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he roared.

The bands, which had been instructed to stop playing when the speeches began, stopped at the first syllable. The musicians wanted to get over to the truck themselves and see what was going on.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the Opposition!" went on the Senator. "This is Senator Slopshire addressing you from my own sound truck which was in dastardly fashion

stolen by one I have loved and trusted for many years. I shall neither love nor trust him again. . . . So I am accused of inefficiency, eh? Well, if to put trust in a man by whom I have been led in prayer, at whose pulpit I have sat for spiritual guidance, who has blessed my food—which I gladly shared with him—if to put trust in that man is inefficient, then I plead guilty! Yes! I am a hopeless inefficient! I did trust him!

"This is the closing night of my campaign for reelection. Thousands had gathered at Trentfare to hear my final message and my summary of the issues of this campaign. But the instant I heard that these children of mine had been ruthlessly snatched from the swimming pool and dragged away on this chilly autumn night in thin bathing suits, still wet from swimming—when I heard that, I stopped in the middle of a sentence. I waived the issues. I relinquished the campaign. I sacrificed any votes to be gained there, and rushed here at full speed to save my children. If that is inefficiency, yes! I am a hopeless inefficient!

"Crouched beside me, here in my sound truck, are these three girls, three American children, bereaved young orphans. They are still in the wet bathing suits they wore when kidnaped, they are shivering and blue with cold. Their very lives have been endangered by this despicable act. I could stand here for hours expounding the issues of this campaign; it is a great opportunity; but I relinquish that opportunity. I sacrifice any votes to be gained here. I go to take my children to warmth and comfort; I go to see them safe in their little beds, with what precautions may be taken to save them from the danger of this terrible

exposure they have suffered. If that is inefficiency, ladies and gentlemen, yes! I am a hopeless inefficient."

"Give them some Bible," said Limpy grimly. "They used Bible on you."

The Senator hesitated briefly. He hadn't been brought up on the Bible like Brother Wilkie and the girls. He had a special clerk to handle his quotations. He tried desperately to remember something.

" 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap,' " he finally roared. "I thank you."

"Come on, girls," he ordered and immediately left the truck. Again cameras were grinding, lights flashing. The Senator saw nothing, heard nothing. As he told Olympia afterward, he was so burned up he didn't even remember making a speech.

"Come on," he thundered to the girls from the bottom of the steps.

They hung back shyly, fearing the crowd, the cameras, the lights.

"I'll go first," said Helen bravely. "Stop crying, Limpy. Keep your head up! We've nothing to be ashamed of."

Very pale, unsmiling, with young head high—dignified, even with wet curls clinging to brow and cheeks—Helen went down. Adele followed, looking straight ahead of her, eyes wide, lashes unlowered.

"Oh, my darling," groaned Len Hardesty as she passed, but she did not turn her head.

She was shivering; more from nervous excitement than from cold, for their heated emotions had warmed them. But the crowd did not know that. Angry cries went up, Opposition though they were.

"Disgraceful!" "Disgusting!" "Poor things!" "Isn't she lovely?"

A lady took off her fur scarf and placed it on Adele's shoulders. "Take it, darling," she said sympathetically. "I'll come and get it some time."

Limpy came last, looking small and woebegone, with childish, tear-stained voice. She could not raise her eyes, she could not see. Uncle Lancy was waiting for her. As she stumbled weeping on the step, with a grand gesture he took off his smart fall coat and put it about her, picked her up in his arms and carried her to the door of the car.

Aunt Olympia tried to take her away from him, but the Senator was firm about that. He held her tightly. There was a little confusion getting into the car. Helen and Adele had hurriedly crept into the rear seat, but since both Uncle Lancy and Olympia wanted to sit with Limpy, they got out, huddled now in warm automobile robes generously contributed by tearful sympathizers and got in the front seat with the driver. Martin was at the wheel, Ben Baldy being so wrought up over the occurrence he could not be trusted to drive carefully.

Limpy at last was warmly ensconced between uncle and aunt, each with an arm around her and trying to pull her away from the other.

"Leave her alone, Ollie," said the Senator, with unaccustomed acerbity. "I'm trying to warm her up."

"I'm warmer than you are, Del!" she said angrily. "Her place is in a mother's arms!"

Limpy diplomatically continued to weep bitterly and submitted to pulling from both sides.

"Home, Martin, fast!" said the Senator.

"But drive carefully," said Aunt Olympia. "An accident would make them nervous."

For many miles the car sped along in complete silence except for the screaming sirens of the biggest police escort accorded any candidate in any state in the 1938 campaign. Finally, in a small voice, Limpy spoke.

"Uncle Lancy, perhaps I'd better make a clean breast of it," she said humbly. "You may as well know the worst. I—I made a—sort of a speech."

Uncle Lancy patted her knee with his free hand. "Did you indeed?" he said heartily. "That was nice of you, Limpy."

"It wasn't so hot," she confessed. "I'm afraid it was a little too—extemporaneous. . . . I didn't seem to have much to say."

"I have the same trouble myself," said the Senator encouragingly. "I often wonder how I can talk as long as I do when I have so very little to say."

"What did you say, Limpy?" asked Aunt Olympia, jealously edging into the conversation.

"Oh, I didn't say much," admitted Limpy. "I—I just said Uncle Lancy is—a swell guy."

Uncle Lancy was so touched that he started to reach for his glasses but remembering just in time that Aunt Olympia would get Limpy away from him if he did, he resigned himself and settled back in the fog.

"A very commendable sentiment," he said approvingly. "I've often wanted to say the same thing but I never could find just the opportune moment for it. You have to get a good break to work in a thing like that. I congratulate you, my dear."

"Be quiet," said Olympia rudely. "The girls are too tired to be talked to."

Hilda, though she had not expected them for hours, received them dourly but without surprise. She did not even raise an eyebrow at sight of the girls, in swim suits, swathed in automobile robes. It was not easy to surprise Hilda.

"Where are the prizes?" she inquired, with irritable interest.

"Prizes!" boomed Aunt Olympia.

"Wasn't it a beauty contest?" said Hilda. "Seems as if to me they're dressed for it."

She helped Aunt Olympia give them hot baths and rub them down with rough warm towels; gave them all the hot lemonade they could drink and warmed their beds with hot-water bottles. Uncle Lancy telephoned the doctor to find what preventive measures should be taken and was relieved to learn that everything that had been done was the right thing, and that they need only be kept warm and quiet until they had thoroughly recuperated.

"And if they catch anything, we'll see what to do next," said the Doctor, which Uncle Lancy faithfully retailed to Aunt Olympia.

As a final precaution, Aunt Olympia made each take an aspirin and five grains of quinine. Hilda closed the windows and lowered the blinds.

"Now, just calm down, my dears, and go to sleep," said Aunt Olympia soothingly. "If you feel wakeful or nervous or a chill coming on, ring immediately for Hilda and she'll give you more hot lemonade and quinine. And thank God it's over. You've been to Waterloo and now you are safe

and warm in your little beds on St. Helena. Don't get up tomorrow. You can have your meals in bed.. There'll be quite a rumpus and more damned reporters nosing around, but keep your door shut and I'll strangle a few, if necessary. Stay in bed a week if you want to. I'll very likely stay with you. And don't worry. I'll bring you Len Hardesty's head on a platter first time I get my hands on him."

Then she turned off the lights and closed the door.

She headed at once for the room she shared, rather grudgingly, with the Senator.

"Another pitcher of hot lemonade for the Senator," she said to Hilda over her shoulder. "Some whisky and another box of aspirin and a hot-water bottle and plain water for me. Plenty of whisky."

The Senator was already in nightshirt and bathrobe and warm slippers. He was smoking a cigarette.

"Did you take their temperature?" he demanded. "Did they have a chill?"

"I wish you'd be more grammatical, Del," she said irritably. "How can three girls have one temperature and one chill? Did you change to your flannel nightshirt?"

"My dear, it's a very mild night. You know I never change to flannel till the first snow."

"It's a chilly night, or I miss my guess! I've got trouble enough without pneumonia." She fished roughly about in a drawer and produced the flannels. "Change," she ordered briskly. "And be quick about it."

The Senator made the exchange rather than start an argument.

"Did they seem feverish?" he asked.

"If Limpy caught cold—and she's still shivery—I'll sue

that louse," said Aunt Olympia, to whom sueing was a far more menacing procedure than a mere wringing of necks. "In fact, I'm not sure but I'll stand on my constitutional rights and sue the American system. You'd better get in bed, Del. Here comes Hilda with your lemonade and whisky. You'd better take these two quinine, first."

"You only gave them one quinine," he remonstrated.

"More grammar. One apiece," she reproved him severely. "Anyhow, you're older than they are and have less reaction. . . . You don't feel anything coming on, do you?"

The Senator got into bed. "Yes, I feel a fade-out coming on," he said, with a smile that was not rueful. "And it was worth it. Did you hear me take the hide off Brother Wilkie?"

"If he just manages to trip over that carpet they blackmailed me into buying and breaks his neck, it'll be cheap at the price. . . . Give him two jiggers, Hilda."

Olympia herself declined the lemonade and took whisky straight, followed by plain water.

"You've had a pretty easy summer, so it won't make any difference if you lose a little sleep tonight, Hilda," she said. "I want you to keep an eye on the girls and if any of them seems to be catching anything, you call me immediately and 'phone the doctor. And don't disturb us. Don't ever disturb us again as long as we live. If anybody calls up, you say the Senator's running for chief shiek of the United Mohammedans and is in a conference with Allah. If reporters come, give them rat poison. We don't want to see anybody or hear anything for the next six months. If you need help, call the police."

"Won't you be wanting coffee?" asked Hilda, almost hopefully.

"Yes. We'll be wanting coffee when we ring for it and that's all we will be wanting. Be sure to keep an eye on the girls and let me know if they start chills or fever. . . . Coffee, nothing else."

"Won't you be wanting the morning papers?"

"Heavens, Ollie!" ejaculated the Senator, and the unwonted profanity showed how wrought up he was. "I forgot the press. Do you suppose they got pictures?"

"Well, thank God the girls have straight legs," said Olympia. "No, Hilda. No papers! Never any more papers as long as we live! Good night, Hilda. Go and look in on the girls, will you? If they need anything, let me know."

When the door had closed on Hilda, Olympia turned off the lights and for ten full minutes a deep and serene silence held the room. But Aunt Olympia was uneasy. The Senator, poor dumb cluck, could lie there catching anything and never even recognize his symptoms. Unable to endure her uneasiness, she turned on the lights and gave him a straight look.

He was lying—bland, near-sighted eyes wide open—with a broad smile on his pink, seraphic face.

"Can I get you something?" he said, politely.

"No," said Olympia. "What are you smiling about? Do you feel hysterical?"

"Oh, no," said the Senator gently. And then added, with modest diffidence, "Ollie, did you notice the terrific wallop I gave Jim Allen? He went down like a ton of brick. I never realized my own strength."

"Yes, I noticed it," said Olympia, sadly, turning off the light.

"You know, Ollie," he went on, with shy boastfulness, "all my life I've dreamed of some Lochinvar who would knock out a state chairman. But naturally I never expected to do it myself. You know, Ollie, I know history pretty well, and as far as I know I'm absolutely unique. I never heard of a United States Senator retiring over the prostrate form of his state chairman."

"It's too bad it couldn't have been the Opposition chairman," said Olympia, dully, for she was bruised in spirit.

"That wouldn't be the same, Ollie," he said contentedly. "Not at all the same."

Chapter XV

Hilda went to the girls' room.

They had the lights turned on again and were sitting up in bed, talking nervously, in broken sentences, interrupting each other. Limpy, being sad and lonely, had got in Helen's bed for company. Hilda hadn't the faintest idea what had transpired and was too proud to ask, but she was apt at picking up shreds and piecing them together. And any dunce could see that something had gone wrong.

She glowered at the girls.

"I should report this to your aunt," she said, carefully closing the door behind her to keep Aunt Olympia from hearing.

"Oh, don't, Hilda," said Helen. "She's had a ghastly time! She will go all to pieces if she doesn't get a little rest."

"If you got fever, I got to report it," she said firmly, staring suspiciously at the three faces, now flushed scarlet.

"We haven't any fever. We're just warmed up from the lemonade and the hot-water bottles," Helen assured her.

"We got warm too suddenly after being cold and wet all evening," Adele explained.

"I should have been took along," said Hilda. "I knew she couldn't be trusted to keep anybody dry."

"Oh, she couldn't help it! She had so much on her

mind, you know! She had our clothes all packed up ready for us but she forgot to put them in the sound truck. That's all."

Hilda pondered this frowningly.

There came the unmistakable crunch of motors pulling up to the garage. It was Dave Cooper, Cecil Dodd, the stenographers and the dejected Ben Baldy, arriving with the sound truck and the trailer. Almost immediately came a peal at the bell.

"I got to go get out my rat poison," said Hilda. "Lay down, now, and let me turn off these lights. Mis' Slopshire was firm about them lights."

She turned off the lights and before she was halfway downstairs Adele had turned them on again and the girls were sitting erect, talking in whispers.

Hilda pieced a good deal together when she admitted Dave, Cecil and the two stenographers. Before Dave could demand audience with the Senator, Cecil Dodd ordered her to show him Limpy.

Hilda gave him an icy glare. "It's not the habit of this house to admit publicity to their young ladies," she said.

"Are they all right? Is she all right? Did she catch cold? Is she still crying?"

"They were half—or maybe not quite half—asleep when I saw 'em, which was just now," said Hilda.

"We've got to see the Senator," said Dave briskly. "Will he come down or shall we go up there?"

"It'll be neither," said Hilda, squaring her angular shoulders. "I got my orders and I'm keeping them. Nobody. Nothing. Not anything. Nothing for six months but coffee."

Dave and Cecil went into an argument and their anger, their uneasiness, their explosive bursts of profanity, soothed Hilda to her normal state of irritation.

"If you're going to sleep here," she said, "I'll show you to your rooms and lock you in. That's my orders. I don't think they meant the rat poison for you but I'm taking no chances."

"How did they take it, Hilda?" asked Dave.

"They took it hard," said Hilda. "I never saw 'em take things harder."

"Is Limpy still crying?" asked Cecil Dodd.

"If she is, it's in her sleep and continues in the same place," said Hilda.

"Will you take a message up to the Senator?"

"I'll take nothing up but coffee and that not till I'm rung for. I'll show you your rooms—"

"And lock the door. Yeah, I know. Well, we're not going to bed. Make us some coffee, will you? . . . It's probably better just to let them sleep it out, Cece, and we'll get busy. We'll use this room, Hilda; no, the library's better; we'll need the 'phone. Get out your typewriters, boys. I'll do my 'phoning first. Bring us some coffee, Hilda, and fix us up some sandwiches, will you?"

"And a shot of whisky," added Cecil Dodd.

Hilda assented to all that but before she left the room she gave one last warning. "If I catch anybody sneaking up toward my young ladies, I got my orders and I brain 'em," she said.

She went upstairs at once and as she had expected found the girls up in bed again.

"The publicity's come and are going to work all night

with coffee and whisky. Would you feel more sleepy if you saw them?"

"Oh, no, Hilda!"

"Oh, please Hilda! Don't let us see them!"

"Can't they go someplace else and work?" moaned Adele. "Do they have to work here?"

"It's usual," said Hilda. "Until they get fired. Have they been fired?" she asked hopefully.

"No, worse luck, they haven't."

"Oh, let them work if they want to," said Helen reasonably. "They won't bother us. Just keep them away from us, Hilda!"

Hilda almost smiled. Keeping people away was the pleasantest thing she had to do.

She went down to the kitchen and, as she was preparing food anyway, she fixed an extra trayful of sandwiches and cakes for the girls and a small pot of coffee.

The girls were sick at heart. They writhed at thought of the ignominy to which they had been subjected, the humiliation they had been forced to endure. Helen wept to think what Brick Landis would think of all this, and what a laughingstock she would be if she ever did marry him and go with him to Congress. Adele did not weep; she could not weep; it was too terrible, too tragic. Her heart, she thought, was simply broken within her. That Len Hardesty would do this to her—and to her sisters! What made it a thousand times more bitter was the burning, half-buried knowledge that she could not entirely hold it against him, couldn't quite quit loving him.

Limpy was in abysmal depths of contrition for her childish outburst.

"I can't imagine what made me do it!" she moaned again and again. "I never dreamed of doing such a thing! Why, oh, why didn't you stop me? If only Aunt Olympia had been there to give me her shut-upping look! It's because I was out of sight, that's what drove me to it! If I could have caught somebody's eye, I'd never have said a word. If he's defeated it will be all my fault, and I'd do anything in the world for Uncle Lancy for he's a swell guy, just as I said."

"I thought you did fine, Limpy," said Adele consolingly. "I was proud of you. I couldn't think of a thing to say myself. I could only shout 'Me, too.' "

Hilda entered with the tray.

"Since everybody's eating, I brought some along up with me."

"Oh, we can't eat, Hilda!" said Helen.

"Food would choke us," said Adele.

"We're heartbroken, Hilda," said Limpy, more confidentially. "I don't suppose we'll ever eat again as long as we live."

"And the sooner we die the better," added Adele.

"I put salted nuts on, too," said Hilda. "There's a fresh box."

"Well, I might just nibble a pecan or two," said Limpy, weakening and reaching for the box.

"They're good sandwiches, if I do say it, with lettuce and ham and cheese all together the way you like it; and butter on both sides. I only gave them ham and butter one side downstairs," said Hilda. "You sleep easier on a full stomach."

"We haven't had anything to eat since that fried chicken

you sent up, Hilda," said Adele, suddenly remembering. "It seems weeks, doesn't it?"

"Poor Uncle Lancy," murmured Limpy, fishing for pecans. "He was so—fond—of the Senate."

"It's a good thing, in my opinion," said Hilda darkly, having gathered that the Senator was doomed. "Now he can settle down private where he belongs and get rid of his digestion."

The girls were young. When Hilda had gone they nibbled the sandwiches, tentatively, out of politeness at first, and then with relish. By two o'clock they had become philosophical about the whole thing.

"It was their idea, making us campaign," said Adele. "If we boomeranged on them, they can't blame us."

"And it was certainly they who wished that snake-in-the-grass, Len Hardesty, on us," added Limpy. "We'd never have dreamed of meeting such a worm in Iowa."

"Maybe this will be a good lesson for Brick," Helen decided. "If he ever finds out about it," she added hopefully. And then, "Of course I shall tell him the whole thing myself as soon as I see him. I wish I could tell him now. Maybe he would withdraw before it is too late."

When Hilda came to take the tray they were showing signs of drowsy resignation.

"We're going to sleep now. Will you raise the window and put out the lights, Hilda?"

Hilda raised the window a scant half-inch, turned out the lights and left the room.

Limpy, who had been most passionate, was asleep almost immediately. Adele closed her eyes but, being saddest, did not sleep at all.

At three-thirty Helen got up softly, slipped down the hall to the Senator's study, closed the door behind her and spent half an hour at the telephone. Coming out, she tiptoed halfway downstairs and listened. From the closed door of the library she could hear the faint click of typewriters, still at work. Hilda was sound asleep, sitting bolt upright in a kitchen chair.

Helen went back to the room and switched on the lights. She closed the windows, lowered the blinds.

"Girls!" she said in a soft, brisk voice. "Wake up! I want you! Adele, wake up! Limpy!"

Adele sat up at once, looking more wan-eyed, more forlorn than ever. Limpy, mumbling protest, finally turned over and opened one eye. Helen's first words brought her upright, wide awake.

"Girls! Get up! Help me! I'm going home!"

"Going home!"

"This is our home!"

"We have no home!"

"There's nobody to—go home to!"

"This is not my home. Iowa's my home and that's where I'm going." Helen was quite calm, very businesslike. She no longer looked tired. "I am not going to stay here and face those horrible reporters tomorrow. I just can't do it. They've been making speeches all summer about exercising the sacred franchise. Well, I'm going to exercise mine. I may get there in time to save Brick before it's too late."

Limpy bounded out of bed. "When do we start?" she asked.

Helen laughed. "You're not starting at all. You're staying here, both of you."

"Aw, Helen!"

"Now don't try to pull that on me, you little fox. I'm not as weak-minded as Uncle Lancy. . . . I know what I'm doing. My mind is made up. Adele has to stay here until she—patches things up with Len. And you have to stay, Limpy, to comfort Uncle Lancy and Aunt Olympia. After all, Limpy, they like you even better than the U. S. Senate. I'm going alone and I'm going to fly. There's a plane taking off at six o'clock and I'm going to catch it. I've already 'phoned for a cab to stand outside the hedge and wait for me. It will cost about fifty dollars. Have you any money?"

The girls ran for their purses and dumped the contents on Helen's bed.

"It isn't enough; but the company will take a check for my fare. Do you mind if I draw on the insurance money?"

"Helen, don't be silly!"

"Whose money is it, anyhow?"

"I'll keep account of all I spend. Tomorrow—but not early, girls; let them rest as long as they can—tomorrow, you just breeze in and tell them the speeches made such an impression on me that I flew out to vote. You'd better do the talking, Limpy, they like you best. And Adele can back you up. I'll take only a traveling bag—"

"You will not! You'll take all your pretty clothes and look like a million dollars!"

"Iowa's going to expect to see something, after your year in Washington!"

"Take your wind-up costume to vote in! That'll be something to take a picture of!"

The girls, too excited yet to feel the sadness of it, fell to packing Helen's suitcases and helping her dress. And at

five o'clock when Limpy on the lookout reported that a cab had stopped near the gate behind the high hedge, Helen kissed them fondly, took a suitcase in each hand and slipped quietly down the stairs. The girls cried a little, for this was their first separation. "The beginning of our united end," Limpy said, tearfully.

Adele and Limpy hung out the window in the foggy dawn of the gray morning and watched Helen walking down the flagstone path, carrying her bags. At the gate, she turned and waved to them, and threw a kiss. Then she went resolutely on and disappeared from their view. The girls waited in the window, waving their hands, until they heard the motor hum away. Then they went to bed together, their arms around each other, crying—laughing a little, too—and finally fell asleep.

Chapter XVI

Wakening about seven-thirty they rang at once and Hilda appeared with a promptness almost miraculous. Adele and Limpy were still together in one bed, propped up on pillows, looking no longer wan, but cheerful and bright-eyed, even excited. Hilda, who had brought coffee for three, made no comment on Helen's absence. She seemed almost cheerful that morning, a dour cheerfulness under close control.

"She thought Helen was in the bath," Adele said when she had gone. "That's a good thing. We don't want her spilling the beans till the time comes."

Regularly at thirty-minute intervals after that, Hilda appeared to ask if they wanted anything or felt a chill. Usually she brought something for them on a small tray, fruit, hot biscuits, or cold milk. Occasionally she brought a message.

"Mr. Hardesty says tell you he feels the same and more so," she told Adele.

Tears came to Adele's eyes and she tried in vain to harden her heart.

"Mr. Dodd is awake from a sleep on the davenport and they're at work again and two boys answering the telephone and he says if you feel nervous he'll challenge somebody."

"I don't feel at all nervous," said Limpy. "But if I see anybody I'm going to be very nervous, so keep everybody off."

Another time: "There's a lot of more cameramen would like your pictures."

"You tell them to mosey right along and mind their own business," said Limpy.

"You tell them the campaign's over and we're never going to have any more pictures taken as long as we live, so help us God," said Adele.

"They got reporters down there I ain't never even seen before," continued Hilda. "They say will you please answer a few questions?"

"Tell them no, we will not answer anybody anything!"

"We don't have to see any more reporters," said Adele. "Aunt Olympia said so! You tell them we're in bed and we're going to stay in bed and we've got campaign cramps."

"You just let us know when Uncle Lancy and Aunt Olympia have had their coffee and got calmed down and leave it to us! This is the holy Sabbath and we're spending it in bed."

Aunt Olympia too had slept, but brokenly. Whenever she wakened she repressed the wish to look in on the girls—repressed it for the Senator's sake, for Lord knew he needed rest. After all, the girls were young; their very youth would bring them back on the rebound from this frightful catastrophe. But it was a bitter pill for the Senator, and would require not only plenty of aspirin, whisky and quinine, but rest as well. So Aunt Olympia lay rigidly in her bed and waited for him to awaken.

Olympia was sick at heart. The Senator would be a good sport about the mess, she knew that. But it would cut! It would cut like the very Old Nick! A man like Senator

Slopshire eating humble pie at the hand of a louse like Brother Wilkie.

"You'd think we'd done enough for him," she mused wretchedly, "listening to all those poor sermons so many years and making a governor out of him! And contributing, too! Always contributing! First to the collection plate and then to the campaign fund! There's no justice! If only I hadn't ordered that Victory Cake!"

She started to vent her feelings in an impatient flounce but, remembering how lightly the Senator slept, restrained herself.

The girls would leave after this, of course. She couldn't blame them. They wouldn't hold her and the Senator responsible for the outrage, but still, they couldn't help feeling they had had enough. Aunt Olympia had had enough, too. She told herself that she would be tickled pink to have it over and done with—except that it griped her to see Del play second fiddle to a louse.

When she felt that she would blow up in spontaneous combustion if she lay still another minute, she turned over on her side, very carefully, making no sound, and took a look at the Senator. To her unbounded indignation he was lying awake, his eyes wide open, looking at her.

"Well, for pity's sake, if you're awake why don't you say so?" she demanded, flouncing vigorously a half-dozen times or more.

"I was keeping quiet not to waken you," he said gently. "You must be tired out. Can't you turn over and catch forty more winks or so?"

Aunt Olympia popped out of bed and started for her bathroom. The Senator went to his. And the splash of

running water, the vigorous sloshing of toothbrushes, testified that their night's rest, such as it was, was over.

Aunt Olympia was back in bed first, whiling away the time with a little work on her under-chin, but the Senator was not long behind her.

"I'm not even going to shave," he said cheerfully. "Thank God it's over."

"It's not over for Brother Wilkie," said Aunt Olympia. "I hope he splits his tonsils over the text this morning."

"Anyhow, we don't have to go to church today," said the Senator resignedly.

"After all," said Olympia reasonably, "we got along all right by ourselves for twenty-five years. I guess we can weather it again."

"Of course we can! And they'll probably enjoy visiting us sometimes—especially when we're out of politics."

"To tell the truth, it's a great relief to me, Del," she said bravely. "Your business is your own and if you wanted to be senator, why, it was your say-so. But personally I've had enough and I'm glad to be out of it so we can live our own life for a while."

"We'd better have some coffee," said the Senator.

Hilda answered the ring with suspicious alacrity. On the tray, with a big pot of coffee, was fresh fruit and a small covered plate of hot muffins.

"You may need sustainment," she said grimly.

She gave the Senator a severe look. "Mr. Allen came about two o'clock with a dozen more hungry politicians for me to feed and with blobs of blood around his nose and a very black eye for which I offered him a beefsteak and he asked me to fry it, please, and took another of the same."

"A bloody nose?" gasped the Senator.

"A black eye!" ejaculated Aunt Olympia.

"It seems he hit the leg of a bench as he went down but giving the Senator the credit," said Hilda reprovingly. "Anyhow they ate all the steaks and are now working on the ham and eggs."

Beneath her arm, in direct defiance of orders, Hilda bore a huge stack of morning papers.

Olympia frowned at sight of them.

"I said coffee and nothing but coffee and by all means none of those filthy sheets that are a profanation to the holy Sabbath."

Hilda laid the papers on the foot of Olympia's bed and arranged the tray on a small table between them. Her expression disturbed Aunt Olympia. In anybody else, it would have been definitely pleasurable; in Hilda, it was merely sardonic.

"I thought you might like a look at the pictures anyhow," she said. "And besides, I had to get them out of my way downstairs, cluttering things up, with politicians all over the place."

"How are the girls?" asked Uncle Lancy diplomatically.

"They are all right—what I seen of them," she added, with dour significance.

"You should have been at the rally," said Aunt Olympia, with a twinge that would have done justice to a toothache. "You'd have seen plenty of them."

Hilda moved toward the door. "I got to go now," she said. "I been giving coffee and doughnuts and boiled eggs to reporters and camera men for four hours. Mr. Cooper and Mr. Dodd and the boys worked all night and the tele-

phone's been ringin' steady since six o'clock and they sent to town for more stenographers to take the messages."

Aunt Olympia swallowed hard. She looked at the Senator. He was gazing at his coffee. Obliged to say something, she said faintly, "Oh, yes. From—the constituents."

"From everybody I ever heard of so far and some I ain't. We ain't opened the telegrams yet. No time. We put them in the potato basket. I'm boiling the potatoes to make salad for everybody that'll be coming before the day's over. I'm boiling another ham, too."

Aunt Olympia groaned and closed her eyes. She waved feebly for Hilda to go away.

Hilda paused once more.

"Seems as if to me the girls did all right for theirselves," she remarked cryptically and closed the door behind her.

Aunt Olympia did not open her eyes until she could hear Hilda creaking downstairs.

"After election, I'm going to fire that idiot," she said bitterly. "I don't mind her not being able to speak English, but she might at least make a little sense in some language!"

"Try one of these muffins, my dear," said the Senator. "Piping hot! Hilda's muffins make sense in any language."

Aunt Olympia, feeling dulled and bruised, mechanically set her teeth into a muffin. It was all right. Her eyes wandered to the pile of papers on the foot of the bed. Purposefully, she forced them away and looked at the Senator. He was looking at the papers, too, rather sheepishly, over the rim of his cup.

"Whoever gave a patent to the fool that invented kodaks should be strung up for treason! Freedom of the press, huh? It's freedom of the press makes cowardly slaves and

craven knaves of otherwise good citizens. You ought to get up a bill about it. The press's freedom is taxpayers' poison." She could have smiled at that. She wished the girls had been there to hear it. Purely extemporaneous it was, too.

But her eyes would not be kept away from the pile of papers. She set her cup down with an impatient little crash.

"Oh, well, we may as well have a look at the pictures, I suppose," she snapped. "They're not bow-legged, that's one thing!"

She reached for the papers and passed two or three from the top of the pile across to the Senator, who was reaching for them. They settled back on the pillows. Suddenly Olympia gasped. "Tch, tch, tch," clucked the Senator, and kept on clucking. Olympia gazed across at him, wide-eyed, speechless. He gazed at her.

"Well, God bless my soul! Think of that now!" he said reverently.

Then they fell desperately on the papers and silence hung between them, except for the crinkle of paper, occasional hissing sighs from Olympia and an almost continuous stream of clucks from the Senator.

The election was as good as won. The girls, and the Senator along with them, had got a terrific press. Newspapermen all over the state had worked on the case all night. They had covered the Dastardly Outrage—in large caps—from every possible angle. Public sentiment was aroused to the highest pitch; public indignation was an inferno. Never had the widely publicized American standard of moral decency been so flagrantly betrayed.

The New York *Herald-Tribune* came out with an edi-

torial denunciation of tactical devices so contrary to pure Republican principle and ideal and declared in unprecedentedly plain English that a preacher's place—even a Republican preacher's place—was in the pulpit.

But the Church wasn't going to have it shunted over onto its shoulders. Prominent divines had been queried and without exception had come out flatfootedly to say that their erring brother would never have stooped to such acts of vandalism while in the sacred precincts of the church and that it was only when he had wandered into the devious paths of politics that his foot slipped. Some said they were going to make a point of it in their Sunday morning sermons, holding up the misguided minister as a horrible example of what happens to the Man of God who chooses political bedfellows.

Spokesmen for the Republican National Committee, being queried, at first tried good-naturedly to laugh the whole thing off as a stunt; but when they realized that public feeling was too much aroused to accept of that, theirs was the loudest voice raised in condemnation of such conduct; only qualifying their condemnation to call attention to the fact that it was this same Senator Slopshire who had first inveigled the churchman into the field of politics, for which he was obviously unqualified; and citing the long friendship and the former close political connection between Brother Wilkie and the Senator, suggested that in that close association, the Governor had doubtless become tarred to some extent with the Senator's stick.

The Democratic National Committee contented itself with a fog-dispelling statement by Charlie Michelson to the effect that if, by some further play of shenanigan,

Brother Wilkie should reap the undeserved reward of success at the polls, they would unseat him on the grounds that his conduct was unbecoming a savage, not to say senator.

"I'd like to see Len Hardesty's face now," said Aunt Olympia happily.

Len Hardesty publicly absolved the Governor of all complicity and shouldered the blame for the debacle; Governor Wilkie pleaded complete ignorance of the entire matter and deplored the incident, with Scriptural quotations for good measure. But the newsmen did not let it rest there. They admitted that while the Governor hadn't been smart enough to think it up, he had certainly been immoral enough to try to reap the advantage of it; they cited his prepared speech, the use of his chauffeur, the arrangement of floodlights.

The deacons of the Methodist Church at Maysville, hastily summoned, agreed that it would be a breach of Sabbath decorum, under the circumstances, for Brother Wilkie to occupy the pulpit that morning and a substitute preacher was hastily procured.

Limpy's speech was quoted verbatim, with Helen's anguished "Don't say brats" in parenthesis. Uncle Limpy's glasses fogged up so over Limpy's speech that Aunt Olympia had to read it aloud to him.

"Now, you see, Ollie," he said reproachfully, "Hilda made good sense indeed. Very good sense. 'Seems as if they have did all right for theirselves,' just as she said."

In the meantime, Hilda, with all she had on hand that hectic day, did not neglect to keep the secluded girls informed.

"They've rung for their coffee now," she said. "It'll take 'em a good thirty minutes to get recomposed."

At the end of an hour, she appeared again. "Mr. Hardesty 'phoned have you any bad effects afterward and he feels the same and they ought to be composed by now, if ever."

The girls got up at once, a little frightened, but determined.

"Shall we dress?" asked Adele.

"Um, no, I think not," said Limpy sagely. "We'd better go as we are. Don't brush your hair, Adele. Don't be too slick. We look more votes-appealy in our bathrobes and a little tousled. But not too tousled. Not tousled enough to be tough."

In bathrobes and slippers, effectively tousled but not tough, they slipped down the hall to that suddenly dread door—keeping sharp lookout for cameras as they went. Limpy knocked bravely but her heart was heavy.

"Anybody but reporters can come in and welcome!" boomed Aunt Olympia joyously.

Limpy opened the door. Aunt Olympia and Uncle Lancy were sitting bolt upright in beds strewn with pages of the morning papers. Both were redly flushed with excitement, beaming broadly. Aunt Olympia held out her arms to them. Uncle Lancy wiped his glasses.

"Oh—hello," said Limpy, taken aback by the surprising cheerfulness of the scene.

"Good morning," said Adele faintly.

"Come in, you dear precious darlings," cooed Aunt Olympia.

"Ring for coffee, my dear!" said the Senator. "They

look pale. Sit down, girls. Nice legs you've got, my dears."

The girls stopped short and looked at each other.

"Would you think maybe the campaign has gone to their cerebellums?" asked Limpy.

"How adorable and rested you do look!" said Aunt Olympia. "You must have had a good night's sleep."

"Did we sleep, Adele?"

"I don't remember."

"We must be on guard though," said Limpy. "These seemingly simple cases often turn violent at a moment's notice."

"We must be armed to protect ourselves," said Adele. "We can use chairs if we have to. Keep close to a chair, Limpy."

"Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you," said Limpy. "We have bad news for you."

"Bad news!"

"Oh, did you catch cold?" wailed Aunt Olympia, in an immediate panic.

"No. Be calm. We didn't catch anything." Limpy's small face puckered with a sudden sadness. "We lost something. We lost—"

"Tish, tish," said the Senator kindly. "Don't give it a minute's thought. I'll buy you another. Where's my checkbook?"

"You can't buy this," said Limpy, feeling suddenly sad and forlorn and homesick. "It is something not for sale! Never for sale! It's—Helen."

The smile faded from the Senator's face. He glanced almost accusingly at the shocked Olympia.

"You've—lost—Helen!" she stammered.

"My dear," said the Senator, reproachfully, "didn't you make sure we had them all with us in the car last night? Do you mean," he went on, becoming excited, "that one of our children is still running around at large among Republicans in—in a wet bathing suit?"

Limpy laughed tearfully. "Oh, we brought her home all right!—but—well—you know, this sacred franchise."

"Franchise!" ejaculated Aunt Olympia. "She's feverish! She wants to buy a bus line."

"Not that kind of a franchise. I mean the vote. Helen got up this morning and took a plane out to Iowa to vote."

"When is she going?" demanded Aunt Olympia.

"She's gone. She went at six o'clock."

Aunt Olympia turned briskly to the Senator. "Del, make a note of that. Call Dave. Tell him to get it in all the Monday papers. That's the kind of citizens we are! After a night like last night, we send one of our children by plane out to a dump like Iowa just to cast her sacred vote."

"Did—she take time to dress?" asked the Senator.

"Oh, yes. She dressed. We helped her. She looked lovely."

"She took the wind-up costume along to vote in," said Adele helpfully.

"Maybe she can get us our groceries at wholesale from this on," said Aunt Olympia philosophically.

"Will she be back after the election?" asked Uncle Lancy.

The faint, familiar flicker flashed between the girls.

"Um—well—I rather doubt it," said Adele.

"Not for a while, at least," said Limpy.

"She's not going to send for you girls to come out there, is she?" quavered Aunt Olympia.

"Um—well—I rather doubt it," said Adele.

"Not for a while, anyhow," said Limpy.

"I'll have her mail stopped," declared Aunt Olympia. "I'll hire a detective. I said she could go when she liked and she can go if she likes. But if she tries to get you away, I'll sue her."

"She won't try to get us," said Adele soothingly. "She'll have her hands full without us. And she may be back, you know."

"For a while, at least," added Limpy.

"My dear," said the Senator suddenly, "ring for Hilda. Tell her to call the highest official of that line and tell him to report to me every hour how the plane goes through. This is—a murky day—for flying."

Tears came to Limpy's eyes. She went over and sat down beside him on the bed and kissed the rosy bald spot on top of his head.

"Uncle Lancy," she said humbly, "I'm really just sick about—disgracing you the way I did. I lost my temper and couldn't help it. But there's one thing you've got to say about my speech. I told the truth, and not many campaigners can say as much. I said you were a swell guy—and—you *are* a swell guy!"

"You didn't disgrace him," said Aunt Olympia jealously. "Sit down, Adele. Sit here by me. Even Hilda realizes you seem 'to have did all right for yourselves.' Haven't you seen the papers?"

The girls covered their eyes with their hands. They groaned.

"No! No, please!"

"No papers! Anything but papers!"

"Oh, have a heart, Auntie! Don't rub it in!"

"Why, you silly little dunces—I mean darlings," roared Aunt Olympia fondly. "Everything's lovely! Everything's jake! In fact, hunky-dory! They liked it."

"They liked what?" asked Adele timidly.

"You," said the Senator. "All of you."

"They're outraged! They're furious! It's an insult to the nation! Their national sense of decency is cut to the core!"

"I don't blame them," faltered Limpy.

"No, no, not you! The Opposition! . . . After all, the public's seen plenty of legs. Legs are nothing. . . . Though a God's blessing they're good legs, I must say. . . . It's Brother Wilkie they're cursing. Even the White House called up."

"Is—is it in the papers?" asked Limpy feebly.

"Certainly it is in the papers! The papers are full of it!"

"Oh. . . . They are. . . . Are they? . . . Did anybody mention—my—speech?"

"They say it was the best speech made in any campaign this year. They print it in full—even to Helen's reminding you about the brats. It was a great speech, Limpy. I wish I'd made it. . . . I just wish I could see Len Hardesty's face now!"

Limpy, blushing faintly, reached for a paper.

"Oh, Adele," she cried. "How sweet—how proud—you look!"

"Look at this one of you, Limpy. Look, where you

come out of the truck. See what it says. AMERICA'S LITTLEST STATESWOMAN TAKES A BOW. Isn't that sweet!"

"Look at this one of Brother Wilkie standing on the platform with his mouth open," said the Senator.

"Look at this one of Len Hardesty standing there like a snake-in-the-grass beside the truck as you pass by!"

"Did—did anybody hear—what he said?" asked Adele, nervously.

"No. It just says he was muttering angrily. What did he say, Adele?"

"Oh, he just said—oh, he didn't say anything—he just—muttered," said Adele.

"Look at this one of the Senator wrapping Limpy in his coat! Isn't that the noblest picture you ever saw of the Senator? Doesn't he look like a real Napoleon standing there with his arms full?"

"We'd better save these pictures and send them to Helen," said Limpy. "She was so embarrassed. She'll feel better when she sees they aren't so bad. We don't show half as much leg as girdle and stocking ads."

"She'll see them," said Aunt Olympia. "Everybody'll see them." She mopped tears of joy from her eyes. "These pictures have swept the country. They've swept the world. I'll bet the King of England is looking at these pictures this morning. . . . Look at this one of me, Adele. It's not very flattering, but it just shows how upset and motherly I am. It'll pull the woman-vote."

Hilda appeared once more.

"There's an awful lot of people on their way here about one thing and another and there's plenty downstairs now

in my opinion eating us out of house and home and Mr. Allen says bygones is bygones—"

The Senator coughed deprecatingly. "Hilda," he reproved her gently. "The young ladies are present. We can dispense with the—gory details."

"And the camera men are waiting to get a picture of you and him and his bloody nose with your arms around each other and Mr. Farley says call him as soon as you wake up and whatever you need you can have and that Ambassador to England says you can have your pick of his nine to get them in training for future and someone whose name we didn't rightly get 'phoned from Iowa and says will Miss Limpy—he said Limpy—be his campaign manager in '40 and would you like more coffee? And Mr. Hardesty 'phones have you any symptoms and he feels the same—"

"My dear," said the Senator. "I think I'd better shave."

Chapter XVII

Aunt Olympia, becomingly gowned and beaming rosily, received the gentlemen of the press that afternoon, in ample time for them to get their stories in for the morning papers. She smilingly but firmly resisted their pleas for five minutes, three minutes, just a look then, at the girls.

"No," she said in her most motherly voice, "I am sorry to refuse you anything. But you do not understand a mother's feelings. The campaign is important; yes! But the health and the nerves of these children come first with their Uncle Lancy and me. Remember the terrible ordeal they were dragged through. They need rest. They need quiet. They have stood all they shall be permitted to stand. But, I must say that three more gallant, public-spirited young citizens never lived than those children, mine and the Senator's. . . . Tired, nervous, suffering with chills and fever as she was, Helen—she's the oldest—she's twenty-one—got up this morning and took the six o'clock plane out to Iowa to vote. She's a resident of Iowa. Exhausted, worried, sick, she just rallied her forces and out she went to exercise the sacred franchise."

Olympia went to her desk and shuffled among the photographs. "This is Helen," she said. "She's very studious. She graduated from college with all kinds of honors when she was only twenty. This shows her at work at the Senator's table—making out her grocery list, I fancy. . . . Adele and little Limpy are more playful. Here's a nice one

of them together in the big swing at Commonwealth Park. Sweet, isn't it? Here they are raking leaves for a bonfire on Hallowe'en. This is Limpy; named for me, of course, and some people think she looks like me, too, in a small way."

The girls spent the day quietly upstairs and amused themselves very well with the papers, smirking over the photographs, which were surprisingly good. Limpy was not so well pleased with the verbatim report of her speech.

"I see what Aunt Olympia meant," she mused. "It doesn't pay to be too extemporaneous."

Flowers came for the girls, telegrams, letters, small gifts; and for Limpy a big ivory donkey, handsomely autographed in green ink:

"Limpy for President in '58,
"And for Campaign Manager,
Your Old Pal,
Jim."

Aunt Olympia, her weariness forgotten, her ill humor dissolved in contentment, was deliriously happy. She, too, received flowers, telegrams and gifts. She read the basketful of congratulations. She cooed into the telephone. She crooned over the girls. She almost felt satisfied with the Senator.

On Monday, the press was still burnt up over the Outrage, and the big New York and Philadelphia papers were as bitter as the smallest country dailies. Phelps Adams, in the stanchly Republican *Evening Sun,* took time out from the affairs of Palestine long enough to write a paragraph

heartily excoriating such utterly un-Republican conduct.

Harold Brayman, erudite correspondent for the *Public Ledger,* viewed with alarm this further deviation from the high moral tone which had always characterized the Grand Old Party in Pennsylvania.

And because they were Iowa orphans who had suffered this indignity—and once an Iowan, always corn-fed—Dick Wilson, of the Des Moines *Register and Leader,* became so worked up over it that he entirely forgot his own campaign for the vice presidency of the National Press Club and drew no end of morals from the entire incident, climaxed with the opinion that lambs like Iowa Republican orphans have no real place in the lions' den of a Democratic campaign.

The Senator made his final appeal over the radio on Monday night and an effective job he made of it; speaking with quiet dignity, restraint and reasonableness, pointedly ignoring personal phases except for one paragraph, which the entire staff had a hand in preparing.

"My friends, I address you tonight on the issues of this campaign. I speak only of the issues. The sad infringement of the sanctity of my home is not one of these issues. My personal feelings in that tragic matter are relegated to the background at this time. But to those thousands of you, my friends, who have written, telephoned and wired solicitous inquiry as to the health of my young wards, and whether they have suffered serious ill effects from the physical and mental anguish of their tragic and deplorable experience, I am happy to relieve your fears. The children are young, but they are brave and high-spirited. In the safe serenity of my home at Maysville, in quiet seclusion,

they are recovering from the brutal shock to their innocent trust and confidence which was even greater than their physical discomfort. And the eldest of them, Helen, has arrived safely in Iowa by plane where on the morrow she is to cast her first vote as an American citizen."

Tuesday, the eighth of November, was election day. The Senator and Mrs. Slopshire had planned—and made public pronouncement to that effect—that after casting early votes, they would spend the day quietly at home with the children, having a large family dinner—a pre-Thanksgiving, it was, really—in the middle of the day, and in the evening, from six o'clock on would be at home to their friends with a buffet supper and listen to the returns.

In the Governor's Mansion on the other side of Maysville, the Opposition was to be entertained at an evening reception with light refreshments.

"They'll be light," said Olympia, reading the announcement in the paper. "Very light. Almost too light to lift. He's already begun cutting down—ever since Adele pointed out the handwriting on the wall."

Olympia, although she wanted desperately to have the pride of taking the girls with her to the polls, finally decided against it. They couldn't vote, and she was a little afraid it would look like "putting on." She wasn't above "putting on" all she could, but she didn't want it to look obvious. This, she felt, would look obvious. And then, at the last moment, she had cause to regret her restraint.

Ben Baldy had drawn the big car up to the west veranda to convey them to the voting place. The Senator was waiting, hat and gloves in hand, Limpy and Adele were

there, dancing a-tiptoe with excited farewells, speeding them on to victory. Dave was stolidly planted in the front seat with Ben Baldy. Aunt Olympia, having kept them waiting only fifteen minutes, came out in a rosy flush. She kissed the girls and permitted the Senator to assist her into the tonneau and seat himself at her side.

"Come along, Cece!" she boomed joyously.

"Oh, I'm not going!" said Cecil Dodd. "I'm not a resident of this state. I can't vote here."

"Well, why don't you go home and vote then? You've time enough to make it!"

"I can't. I was so worked up over the campaign I forgot to register."

"Well, come along anyhow!" said Olympia, sudden anxiety darkening her happy eyes. "Come along and watch us."

"I can't!" said Cece desperately. "I've got to shave."

"Shave!" she boomed angrily. "Shave! If you aren't shaved already—yes, and half an inch below the surface—then I've lived with whiskers for nothing."

"Okay, Ben!" said the Senator cheerfully. "Good-by, girls! Be good children now."

And the big car rolled away.

"Isn't everything lovely?" exulted Limpy. "Isn't everything sweet? Aren't you happy?"

"I am right now," said Cecil Dodd. "But it won't last. They ought to make voting more difficult and more prolonged. It ought to take at least as long as making out your income tax."

"Oh, well, make the most of the minute!" said Limpy. She caught a hand of Adele's, one of Cecil's, and led them

gaily back into the house. "Let's do something to celebrate! Something exciting! Something naughty, if possible."

"It's exciting for me just to be able to look where I want to," said Cecil Dodd. "And nothing naughty about it, either."

"Think of something naughty!" urged Limpy.

"No, let's not," said Adele. "We've been naughty enough. And I feel responsible, with everybody else away. You'd better keep your eyes on me, Cece."

"No, damned if I will," he said heartily.

"That's nice! That's very naughty!" encouraged Limpy. "Swear some more, Cece, swear louder."

Hilda entered the room with a tray. "I brought some cider for you gir—ladies," she said crossly. "And a little pick-up for Mr. Dodd. It's customary to drink the health of the polls."

"Oh, that's nice! Maybe we should have a pick-up too, Adele! That would be very naughty. . . . Hilda, come here! Where are you going? Don't you drink to the health of the polls? How irreverent you are!"

Cecil filled the glasses. Hilda, acquiescent but indignant, accepted her glass and stood by in angular disapproval, clicking her glass with the others as they drank their toasts.

"Sloppy for Senator!"

"More votes to Sloppy!"

"Slower votes for Sloppy!" from Cecil Dodd.

"Down with Wilkie!"

"Up with Olympia!"

"Bigger and better eyes for me," said Cecil Dodd, doing very well with those he had.

When they had finished, Limpy made them all hold

hands and dance around the low coffee table that held the cider pitcher and the siphon and glasses.

"Here we go 'round the mulberry bush," she sang.

"Let's give Sloppy a landslide push," suggested Cecil Dodd. And they sang it gaily.

"Time flies fast and we'd better hush—pronounced like bush," said Adele. And they sang that.

"I got to go now," said Hilda. "I forgot to tell you, Mr. Hardesty called up and says he feels the same and he's as good as out of a job right now and he'll be here for breakfast tomorrow."

She stalked away.

"Adele, dear Adele," said Cecil Dodd. "Poor Len! Think of his—his anguish. . . . I know my anguish. . . . Pity him in his distress. Not only has he nothing to look at, he has no job; he can only sit there thinking up Biblical quotations for his dishonored candidate. Don't you think you should go and call him up or write him a note or just go off into some remote silence and send him a tender thought?"

"I do not think any such thing," said Adele, laughing. "I think I shall be an assistant Aunt Olympia and stick around. . . . However, I am going out on the west veranda to pick a few of those late chrysanthemums. And as soon as I hear the car coming I'll be right back on the job again."

She went out laughing.

"She's a swell gal," said Cecil Dodd.

He went then and sat on the arm of Limpy's chair. "The trouble is," he said gravely, "that I'm the only person on earth who realizes how old you are."

"Well, you can't say I haven't told them!" said Limpy indignantly.

Cecil started to put his arm around her. Then he stopped, stood up, moved a few steps away from her.

"Another trouble is," he went on gloomily, "they've nagged at me so much and harped on it so consistently, I'm beginning to think maybe you *are* young."

Limpy frowned at that. "Well, just remember that I've got a job as campaign manager for '40 and that's more than any of you antedeluvians can say!"

Cecil frowned, too. "That was a funny thing. . . . And they couldn't get his name. . . . But I daresay you know who it was."

"Certainly I know who it was. In about twelve hours he's going to be the newly elected Republican Congressman from our district in Iowa. And Helen's going to marry him when they get around to it."

Cecil broke down then. He threw both arms around Limpy, and kissed her, on the ear. Then his lips crept along her cheek and arrived at last, timidly, at her lips.

"I'll tell Aunt Olympia," she said finally, not having hurried him.

" 'A-tisket a-tasket,' " sang Adele warningly before she entered the room. "I hear the hum of returning votes. Where's your razor, Cece?"

"A swell girl! I always said so," said Cecil over his shoulder, already on his way upstairs.

Aunt Olympia's first words were, "What's Cece been doing?"

"He said he had to shave," said Adele.

Her eyes, and Limpy's eyes, went guiltily to the low

coffee table. But Hilda, tidily and unobserved had removed tray and glasses.

The rest of the day passed in comfortable quiet. Ben took the big car and Martin the two-seated Ford to help round up delinquent voters and deliver them safely to the polls. The girls played tennis between showers with Cecil Dodd, under the watchful eye of Aunt Olympia sitting near by in a large camp chair, sheltered against both intermittent rain and sun by a large umbrella. Dave Cooper treated himself to a well-earned nap on the library divan. Hilda, reinforced by two assistants, had a hard day making preparation for the evening buffet which, as Aunt Olympia said—and said it ungrudgingly, too—had to be worth a month's salary.

At five o'clock she began laying the tables. Hilda was adept at this. She had learned from experience that while the spread must at all times look bountiful and even lavish, an abundance must be held in reserve for belated arrivals. But the provision was ample for any contingency. There were roast turkeys, baked hams, sliced tongue, and pickled pig's feet for the more aristocratic constituents who liked to go plebeian on election night; there were sandwiches, salads, baked beans, deviled eggs and aspics; there were cheeses, candies, nuts, cigarettes and cigars; there were ices, teacakes and pies. And on a small table, beautifully decorated and lighted with candles, stood the Victory Cake, two feet high, three feet in diameter. Aunt Olympia was glad she hadn't canceled that order.

By seven o'clock, when the polls closed, the household was in readiness. Uncle Lancy looked suave and senatorial; Aunt Olympia beamed like a sunburned and over-

nourished favorite of Jove; Cecil Dodd took advantage of the occasion to present himself in white tie and tails but Dave stuck to his sack suit, and at the last minute decided against changing his shirt. The girls were a little distressed about the still unworn wind-up costumes, but Aunt Olympia decided they were a little too autumnal for an indoor reception and recommended graceful and becoming—though old—chiffons.

Exactly at seven, cars began streaming into the grounds, and laughing, joyous, congratulating guests were soon drifting through the house and lining up at the tables. Only in the library the doors were closed and silence was maintained, for there the elect were to listen to the returns. Loudspeakers had been set up in other parts of the house, too, but not much attention was paid to them, except that every mention of "Senator Slopshire" brought cheers and a demand for one more toast.

Adele, catching Limpy's eye, summoned her to a corner of the corridor with a suggestive lilt of silken lashes.

"Darling," she whispered, "everybody says it is a landslide for Uncle Lancy. Len must be sick—just sick! The Governor is out and Len will not have a job and—don't you think, darling, it would be nice for me to slip over to the Governor's mansion a minute and—sort of cheer him up?"

"You'll get your picture taken!" warned Limpy.

"Oh, no I won't. I'll change into my wind-up costume; nobody's seen that; and they don't know me so well over there. I'll wear a dark veil. Only Len will recognize me and he'll hold them off."

"Well, as a holder-off, I wouldn't call him tops myself," said Limpy.

"I feel so sorry for him, darling. I've made it awfully hard for him, and even Aunt Olympia says it wasn't his fault. Maybe my conscience hurts."

"Maybe it's just your heart," said Limpy. "There's some kind of tie-up between them."

"But think how much better he would feel—just to see me—and know that everything's going to be all right."

"You're wanted on long distance," interrupted Hilda crossly. "The both of you. It's Iowa."

"Helen!"

The girls raced upstairs to the study telephone. Adele, being older, took the receiver. "Hello—darling!" she said.

"Adele, is Limpy there? . . . Are you all right? . . . How is the Senator coming along?"

"Oh, fine. A landslide, they say."

"Listen, darling. Get Limpy close to the 'phone, so she can hear, too. The returns won't begin coming in here for three or four hours, but Brick and I are going to get married. Right away, girls. I wanted you here, but—we want to do it now, so we will be together—however it goes. At eight o'clock, girls. So at eight o'clock, you slip off and say a little prayer for Brick and me, will you? You'd better not tell Auntie till tomorrow. I can imagine what a wreck she is! Wasn't Limpy's speech great? Everybody is crazy about it out here. . . . Adele, I know you and Len will get together again, but—tell Limpy—she is to come and live with us. Brick wants her, too. It may be Congress and it may be the same old grocery store. But we want Limpy. Don't forget, girls. At eight."

The girls waited. And a little before eight, they went upstairs together and closed the door of their room and

locked it. They both stood up, holding hands, and at eight o'clock, Adele said, "God bless Helen and Brick," and Limpy said, "Amen." And then they wept, but happily, in each other's arms.

As a matter of fact, Helen was not married till a full hour later, for the girls had forgotten the difference between Eastern Standard and Central time, but already their loving prayer had gone winging on its way.

Then Adele, wrapped in a long dark cape over her expensive wind-up costume, with a dark veil shielding her face under the jaunty felt hat, kissed Limpy and smiled.

"Adele, if I could only go with you!" pleaded Limpy. "It makes me very nervous for you to go off alone—on such an exciting night—"

"You have to stay, darling. If Auntie sees you she won't miss me. I shan't be gone long; just long enough to tell him it's all right."

"The reporters'll catch you if you don't watch out."

"I'll watch out. Anyhow, it's too late now to lose the election."

Adele slipped quietly out and Limpy was left alone; alone, except for the Senator and Aunt Olympia and the reporters and publicity men and some two or three hundred noisy guests. But she felt very much alone. She went in and stood close to Aunt Olympia. She looked small and her impish sparkle had faded to a plaintive wistfulness.

"Don't you feel well, Limpy?" demanded Olympia, in sudden fright. "You look pale. You'd better go to bed. You'd better take an aspirin. Del! Where's Del? Tell him to call a doctor."

"I feel all right, Auntie," said Limpy, sadly. "I just

feel—lonesome. I—just feel like being as close to you as I can."

Tears came to Aunt Olympia's eyes. "Limpy!" she said fondly. "Such a week as it's been! You wait, Limpy. We'll make it up to you. We'll go someplace—anyplace you want—you and Adele can decide it. . . . And you can play and dance and have a good time. Here, sit here by me. Give her a pillow, Cece. . . . You can go now, Cece. . . . She's tired; she can't talk. Hilda! Where's Hilda? Bring her a sandwich, Hilda."

In the grounds surrounding Shires, in the streets, and all through the town of Maysville, sirens shrieked, horns blared, excited voices roared approving cheers.

Inside the Senator's house, telephones rang, glasses clicked, and in the library, the radio blared returns.

"Lehman and Dewey running neck and neck!" "Willis has a slight edge in Indiana." "Gillette of Iowa is trailing." "Wagner forges ahead." "Barbour is out in front." "It's a landslide in Maryland." "The Solid South—still solid." "Murphy lags in Michigan." "Slopshire far in the lead." "McCarran holding his own in Nevada."

"You're wanted on the 'phone," said Hilda to Limpy, in a diplomatic whisper. "They been trying to get you thirty minutes but couldn't worm through them congrats."

Limpy ran up to the telephone once more.

"Limpy!" It was Adele's voice. "Darling—Limpy—Len feels terribly, darling. I haven't cheered him up as much as I expected. The Governor is furious at him—though very polite in public. And he's out of a job, as I expected. And after all, I'm entitled to part of the insur-

ance, don't you think so? And I think it's really my duty to use it, my share of it, I mean, to keep the wolf off Len till he gets a job. . . . Are you listening, Limpy?"

"Am I listening? . . . Are you nuts? . . . You sound nuts! . . . Listen, Adele, this racket's too tough for us. We haven't got the alligator hides to take it. Now you take an aspirin and call the doctor and—"

"We've already called a clerk to rig up a marriage license, and we've arranged for Brother Wilkie to perform the ceremony and we think we'd better just get married, darling, and settle down," finished Adele.

Limpy swallowed hard. This was worse than she had expected.

"It sounds like something Len Hardesty would cock up, the worm!" she said, with tears in her eyes. "Where do you plan to do this—dastardly deed?"

"Here, Limpy. At the Governor's mansion. There's not much going on here."

"Adele, now you listen to me for a change. I'm coming to the wedding. . . . Oh, yes, I am. . . . I've got some family rights, haven't I? I've been cheated here—and cheated there—but this time I'm coming. I want to be the bridesmaid."

"Limpy, think of Auntie's nerves!"

" 'Think of fiddlesticks!' " quoted Limpy fiercely. "If you do anything before I get there, I'll file papers of annulment. I'll get Aunt Olympia to sue somebody. If you could get along without speaking to him for six weeks, you can certainly wait five minutes to marry him. Good-by."

Limpy raced downstairs. The first thing she caught was Cecil's eye. She gave him an inviting lilt of her small head.

"Cece," she whispered. "I've got to disappear for a few minutes."

"Swell! I'll disappear with you."

"No, you can't. If we both disappear, Aunt Olympia'll get out a search warrant. I'm in a—very tight place. I—I've got nobody but you, Cece, to depend on. . . . Aw, Cece?"

"What do you want me to do?" he demanded.

"I want you to keep yourself right in front of Aunt Olympia till I get back, so she can see you every minute and know you're not off some place looking at me. I feel terrible—left alone—and lonesome, Cece. I don't know what I'd do if I hadn't you to depend on."

"Okay," he said. "Don't be gone long or I'll get out a search warrant myself. Can I get you started or anything?"

"How good are you to me, Cece," she said gratefully. "No. Just get in front of Aunt Olympia."

Suddenly remembering that though the day had been mild, it was a fall night and the papers had predicted a cold snap with flurries of snow, she caught the first wrap she could lay hand on. It was a very nice squirrel jacket. It belonged to Mrs. Mabel Shane-Tompkins, Chairman of the Ladies' Division of the State Committee.

As she was struggling to get her arms into it, she was disconcerted to find Hilda helping her.

"Oh. . . . It's you," she said. Then, "If Aunt Olympia asks about me, you can just say I've gone to—snatch a little rest—and I'll be back pretty soon; and I'm quite all right now and I've taken an aspirin and tomorrow will be plenty of time to call the doctor."

Hilda gave her a very ugly look.

"It doesn't seem as if to me you're exactly dressed for no rest," she said.

"I do my best resting in furs," said Limpy, firmly. "It's a habit. Tell her I'll be back—I mean down—very soon."

Then she put her squirrel-swathed arms around Hilda and kissed her. "Oh, Hilda," she said. "You'll have to be a sister to me from this on. They're—both gone. . . . You're all I have left."

Hilda squared her very square shoulders. "I'll stand guard on your door over my dead body," she said. "You got a car?"

"No. I'll find a taxi running around somewhere."

"You better go out through my kitchen. They got a hired doorman in front."

Hilda went with her. Rushed as she was, and for all her fury of indignation, Hilda realized that Limpy was the big job around that house. She called a policeman and had him pick up a car, and waited with Limpy till it came. Hilda gave the driver his orders.

"You take her wherever she's going and wait for her and bring her back. I got your number and I got influence with the Senator and you take her and bring her back with no back-talk from anybody or I speak to the Senator about it."

Hilda was no coward. She went straight to Aunt Olympia.

"I just put Miss Limpy where seems as if to me maybe she can get a little rest for a while and God knows she needs it and I'll have her on hand for when they get through giving all them dumb states nobody ever heard of

and we cut the Victory Cake and here's another plate of sandwiches."

"That was very nice of you, Hilda," said Olympia gratefully. "Very nice. Did you give her an aspirin?"

"I gave her everything she needed," said Hilda with surprising diplomacy. "And nobody's to bother her in no way till I say so or I speak to the Senator."

"That's fine! You keep watch over Limpy and I'll keep an eye on Cece—and the other guests," she added quickly.

"Slopshire wins in a walk!" announced the radio. "Murphy lost in the shuffle." "Van Nuys and Willis neck and neck." "Gillette, after trailing a while, pulls slowly ahead." "Case, of South Dakota, wins by the largest majority ever given a candidate in that state." "Lehman increases his lead." "It's all over with Wilkie; he can never overtake the Senator."

Chapter XVIII

When it was evident that the Senator had indisputably won, when Brother Wilkie had, without Biblical quotation, conceded his defeat, they had a fresh bowl of punch and cut the Victory Cake. Aunt Olympia wouldn't allow the girls to be disturbed. It was Cecil Dodd who first suggested it, and that alone was enough to stiffen her determination.

"Hilda put them to bed and they're staying in bed," she said decisively. "We'll save them a piece of cake. Tomorrow, I'll buy them a whole cake if they want it. They're not to be disturbed any more tonight."

Presently the guests began drifting away. They had worked hard during the campaign. They were worn to the ragged edge. Now, well dined, well wined, they were ready for bed. Mrs. Mabel Shane-Tomkins was a good deal disconcerted not to lay immediate hand on her squirrel jacket, and muttered a few disagreeable remarks about what you could expect among politicians, drunk with the spoils of victory. But Hilda was sardonically diplomatic about it.

"I'll give you a receipt for the coat and see you get it and here I got Mis' Slopshire's mink coat for you which cost the Senator plenty dough and as good as new. I been sort of removing things around and putting 'em away in safety including Miss Limpy and I probably put your squirrel away in safety but I got no time right now to get into

the—storage for it. I'll see you get it tomorrow and you needn't give me a receipt for Mis' Slopshire's mink 'cause I know you got it so you take the mink and if you don't get your squirrel tomorrow you can keep the mink and Mis' Slopshire can fight it out with the Senator."

Not more than a dozen remained, clustered in the library, avidly drinking in the late returns, when Hilda, who had been a good deal upset over the whole matter in her cold, Scandinavian way, saw a cab turn into the drive and pull up to the western veranda. She had the door open for Limpy.

"You forgot your aspirin and Mis' Slopshire's a good deal upset about it and kindly give me that squirrel 'cause Mis' Slopshire's going to be as mad as a wet hen if she doesn't get back her mink that cost the Senator two thousand dollars and wasn't worth it in my opinion," was her surly greeting. "And they're all in the Library now and asleep on their feet and me the same."

Limpy gave her the coat. "Oh, Hilda," she said. "If I feel very lonesome tonight—and can't sleep—may I come and get in bed with you? I feel—very lonesome."

"I'll change the sheets," said Hilda. "I'll bring you a turkey sandwich."

Limpy opened the door of the library. She looked very small and pale.

"Oh, Aunt Olympia, I've got bad news for you," she said timidly.

"Bad news! There is no bad news! Why, he won in a walk!"

"Oh, how terrible!" said Limpy. "Are you sure? . . . Then probably he'll never get a job and it will take all the

insurance money to support them and I'm no better than a pauper."

Uncle Lancy straightened his glasses for a better look at her. Cecil Dodd turned off the radio. Every eye was on Limpy.

"My dear," said the Senator reproachfully, "she's feverish! Haven't you been keeping an eye on her?"

Hilda came to the door. "Well, here's two sandwiches and a glass of cider and you're wanted on the 'phone and it's Iowa again."

Limpy didn't bother to go upstairs. She leaped lithely to the 'phone on the Senator's big table.

"Darling!" she said. And after a long pause. "Darling!... Oh, darling!... Good-by."

"Three dollars for three darlings," said Aunt Olympia.

"And cheap at the price," said Cecil Dodd.

Hilda had waited dourly with the sandwiches and cider.

"You'd better eat a bite," she said. "You look pretty washed out to me."

Limpy took the plate, with a melting smile into Hilda's resentful blue eyes. "Oh, thank you! How good you are to me! Oh, Auntie, I forgot to tell you the bad news!"

"There isn't any bad news," said Aunt Olympia. "Brother Wilkie's already conceded." And then, in a panicky voice she added, "Unless you've got a chill! Hilda, where's that aspirin?"

"I haven't. But Auntie—you—you remember Helen, don't you?" Aunt Olympia's lips parted but she had nothing to say. Uncle Lancy coughed deprecatingly. "Well, she voted all right. And her vote counted, too. Her congressman won. But that isn't the worst of it. You know

Helen! She wasn't satisfied with just voting for a candidate, so she went right ahead and—married him. She wore her wind-up costume to do it in. A swell chap, Uncle Lancy, though Republican. The Republicans are quite good class, in Iowa."

"She married a—congressman-elect!" ejaculated Aunt Olympia. "What's she going to do about that grocery store?"

"Oh, that's so, too! Well, you know Iowa, Auntie. Such a state! The grocery store turns out to be the congressman-elect and now he's my brother-in-law."

Aunt Olympia was surprised but she rallied. After all, she had known from the beginning that Helen was lost to her.

"Well," she said cheerfully, "that bucks up my grocery bill no end. We'll charge from this on."

"Oh, but darling, that isn't all!" said Limpy warningly. ". . . What a day it has been!"

"You mean there's more? Don't tell me she's suing for a divorce already!"

"No. It's . . . Adele."

The sudden silence rather frightened Limpy. Uncle Lancy took off and put on his glasses several times. Aunt Olympia sat motionless.

"You see, Auntie, darling Auntie—Adele—she's so tender-hearted! She felt so sorry for Len, the poor dumb cluck; with the Governor mad at him, and no job, and Adele not speaking to him for six weeks. So she went over for a minute—"

"She went over where?"

"Oh, just over to the Governor's mansion! To see Len a

minute and cheer him up. And so they decided they'd better get married and I went over and Brother Wilkie married them. I was sad about it, of course, but it was rather amusing. It wasn't at all political, Uncle Lancy. Brother Wilkie performed the ceremony and they used the defunct victory cake for a wedding cake. And the brats and I were the bridesmaids but the beldame got mixed up and thought it was another speech and right in the middle of the ceremony she banged with her trumpet and shouted, 'Tell em, Nevvy!' But you certainly can't blame Adele, for what could she do about it? She's always been tender-hearted! . . . Aw, Uncle Lancy!"

The Senator wiped his glasses. "He's a nice boy," he said. "I always liked Len. It wasn't till the church got hold of him that he began going to the dogs. Once he shakes the pulpit off his coattails, he'll be all right."

Aunt Olympia rallied to this more slowly.

"You mean—she's already married him?" she asked in a strangled voice.

"Yes. And perfectly legal too. And quite impressive—except for the beldame and the brats. It was almost elegant. She had lovely flowers—but no ring; they hadn't time for that; and probably no money for it, either. They're going to live on our insurance until he lands a job."

"Well, there's one thing, Del," said Olympia, "if you run for the presidency, you've got a publicity man. I'm not afraid of Len Hardesty. It just takes a firm hand to hold him down and I've got a firm hand. Sit down, Limpy. Hilda, bring her an aspirin. I mean a sandwich."

"Oh, but Auntie—darling!" wailed Limpy. "You haven't heard the bad news yet!"

"The—bad—news? There can't be more! There couldn't be more, Del!" she said, in a voice suddenly accusing.

"About me," said Limpy humbly.

Aunt Olympia went weak then. She looked dully in the direction of Cecil Dodd. She couldn't even find voice to express her intention of strangling him.

Limpy broke in quickly, with diplomatic acumen. "Oh, no, darling, not that!" she said. "I mean—you're stuck!"

"Stuck! We're stuck? You mean the election? Have things gone wrong? Turn up that radio!"

"Oh, no, Auntie, not the election. Just me. You're stuck with me from this on," said Limpy pathetically. "Here I am, one poor lone orphan—no home—no Helen—no Adele—no insurance money! Of course, Helen and Brick say I can live with them, and Adele and Len say I must live with them, but I don't approve of outsiders going to live with young married couples, do you, Aunt Olympia? So—you're—just—stuck!"

"What'll you take for your option, Senator?" said Cecil Dodd, briskly.

Aunt Olympia broke into happy tears. She held out her arms to Limpy. "My child!" she said. "My child!"

Limpy started, but the Senator, being closer, caught her first.

"We won't let you be lonesome, Limpy," he assured her. "You can go around with me as much as you like. I'll go down town first thing tomorrow and buy you something. What do you want, Limpy? I'll buy you anything."

"Del Slopshire!" boomed Aunt Olympia indignantly. "You give me that child! You may be a United States

Senator but you needn't go setting yourself up as that child's mother! You hand her right here."

"Anything you want," repeated the Senator, speaking to Limpy, still holding her. "Anything."

"Ask for an assistant publicity man, Limpy, quick!" suggested Cecil Dodd.

"Del, you silly dunce!" cried Aunt Olympia happily. "It's not presents that child wants. It's folks! And you've got them, Limpy! You've got them! . . . Hilda! Where's Hilda? Hilda, bring back that Victory Cake!"

THE END

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